

ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



LUCK

by John Frederick

Author of "The Hammer", "The Higher Strain," etc.

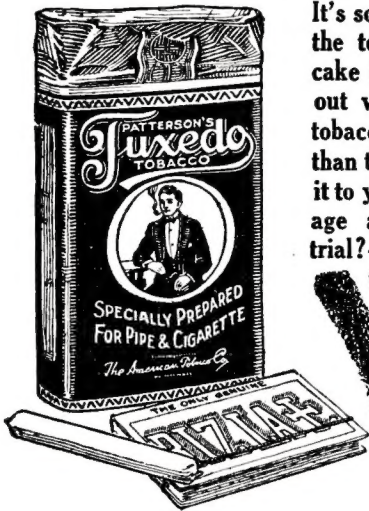
10¢
A COPY

AUGUST

9

\$4.00
A YEAR

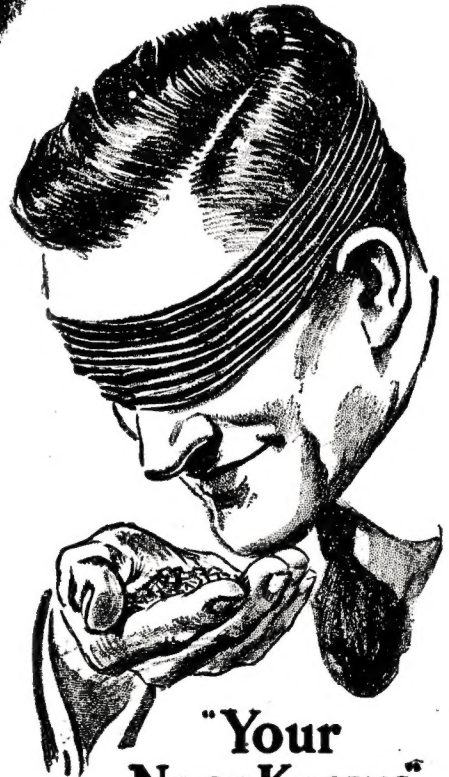
Have You Tried Tuxedo in the New "TEA FOIL" Package?



It's soft and pliable — decreases in size as the tobacco is used — tobacco does not cake in the package — no digging it out with the finger. Keeps the tobacco in even better condition than tin. Now, don't you owe it to yourself to buy a package and give Tuxedo a trial? — Not quite as much tobacco as in the tin, but —

10^c

RIZ LA†. — The lightest, thinnest, finest, strongest cigarette papers in all the world. Roll a Tuxedo cigarette with RIZ LA CROIX.



"Your
Nose Knows"

Finest Burley Tobacco
Mellow-aged till perfect
† a dash of Chocolate

Tuxedo

The Perfect Tobacco For Pipe and Cigarette

Guaranteed by
The American Tobacco Co.
INCORPORATED

Don't Send a Penny

Just send the coupon stating size and width—that's all. We want you to see these shoes at our risk. Examine them, try them on—and then decide as to whether or not you wish to keep them. Our special bargain price is only **\$3.95** per pair while they last. Season's greatest bargain. We send them to you, not a cent in advance, so that you can compare them with any \$6 or \$7 shoes. If you don't think this the biggest shoe bargain you can get anywhere, send the shoes back at our expense. You won't be out a cent.

Only One Pair to a Customer At This Low Price

We can't foretell future prices of material and labor. Times are too uncertain. Therefore all we can tell you **NOW** is that we can guarantee you a pair of these elegant latest style shoes at this remarkably low price provided you send us your order **at once**. And at this price of only **\$3.95** we can send only **one** pair to a customer.

Stylish and Durable

Made of genuine leather in gun metal, popular Manhattan toe last. Blucher style. Comfortable, substantial, long wearing, genuine oak leather soles—reinforced shank and cap. Military heel. Best expert workmanship. Black only. Sizes 6 to 11.

Send Coupon

Sign and mail this coupon. No money now. Wait until they come. We ship them at once. Keep them **only** if satisfactory in every way. Be sure to give size and width. Send now while sale is on. Send no money.

Leonard-Morton & Co.
Dept. 1570 Chicago, Illinois



Pay
Only
\$3.95

for shoes on arrival. If on examination you do not find them the greatest shoe bargain return them and back goes your money. No obligation, no risk to you. But send at once to be sure of getting them. A sale like this soon sells the stock.

Order by No. HA1510.

Leonard-Morton & Co.

Dept. 1570 Chicago, Illinois

Send the Men's Dress shoes No. HA1510. I will pay **\$3.95** for shoes on arrival, and examine them carefully. If I am not satisfied, will send them back and you will refund my money.

Size..... Width.....

Name.....

Address.....

Town..... State.....

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXI

ISSUED WEEKLY

NUMBER 1

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 9, 1919

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

- LUCK. In Six Parts. Part I.....JOHN FREDERICK 1
CHAPTERS I-VII
- THROUGH RABAT'S EYES. In Three Parts. Part II.....CHARLES BEADLE 71
CHAPTERS VI-IX
- ISLE OF DRUMS. In Five Parts. Part III.....J. ALLAN DUNN 100
CHAPTERS VIII-XII
- TRACING THE SHADOW. In Four Parts. Part IV.....CAROLYN WELLS 129
CHAPTERS XV-XVIII

ONE COMPLETE NOVELETTE

- A LETTER OF DISCREDIT.....GARRET SMITH 31

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

- AVALANCHE TACTICS.....RUSSELL A. BOGGS 19
- HIS SIDE PARTNER.....MAY EMERY HALL 60
- RESURRECTING ALABAMA SLIM.....WALLACE M. SLOANE 90
- WHAT GOD DESTROYS.....PAUL STEELE 120
- BLONDE OR BRUNETTE.....WILLIAM C. LENGEL 151
- NOT SO GOOD.....ARTEMUS CALLOWAY 161
- A MEAN RIVER LADY.....RAYMOND S. SPEARS 170
- THE LOG-BOOK.....THE EDITOR 174

"Strength!" might have been an alternate title for

"AVALON"

BY FRANCIS STEVENS

Author of "Citadel of Fear," etc.

It begins most powerfully NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITMURTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered.
PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1919.
Entered as second-class matter September 26, 1917, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.



"I'm as Good a Man as Jim!"

"They made him manager today, at a fine increase in salary. He's the fourth man in the office to be promoted since January. And all were picked for the same reason—they had studied in spare time with the International Correspondence Schools and learned to do some one thing better than the rest of us.

"I've thought it all out, Grace. I'm as good a man as any one of them. All I need is special training—and I'm going to get it. If the I. C. S. can raise other men's salaries it can raise *mine*. If it can bring a better home with more comforts to Jim and his family it can do it for *us*. See this coupon? It means *my* start toward a better job and I'm going to mail it to Scranton tonight!"

Thousands of men now know the joy of happy, prosperous homes because they let the International Correspondence Schools prepare them in spare hours for bigger work and better pay. You will find them in offices, shops, stores, mills, mines, factories, on railroads —everywhere.

Why don't *you* study some one thing and get ready for a real job, at a salary that will give *your* wife and children the things you would like them to have?

You can *do* it! Pick the position you want in the work you like best and the I. C. S. will prepare you for it right in your own home, in your spare time—you need not lose a day or a dollar from your present occupation.

Yes, you *can* do it! More than a million have done it in the last twenty-eight years. More than 100,000 are doing it right now. Join them without another day's delay. Mark and mail this coupon!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Scranton, Pa. Montreal, Can.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS BOX 2227, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER | ☐ SALESMANSHIP |
| ☐ Electric Lighting and Railways | ☐ ADVERTISING |
| ☐ Electric Wiring | ☐ Window Trimmer |
| ☐ Telegraph Engineer | ☐ Show Card Writer |
| ☐ Telephone Work | ☐ Sign Painter |
| ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER | ☐ Railroad Trainman |
| ☐ Mechanical Draftsman | ☐ ILLUSTRATING |
| ☐ Machine Shop Practice | ☐ Cartooning |
| ☐ Toolmaker | ☐ BOOK KEEPER |
| ☐ Gas Engine Operating | ☐ Stenographer and Typist |
| ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER | ☐ Cert. Public Accountant |
| ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER |
| ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER | ☐ Railway Accountant |
| ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER | ☐ Commercial Law |
| ☐ Marine Engineer | ☐ GOOD ENGLISH |
| ☐ Ship Draftsman | ☐ Teacher |
| ☐ ARCHITECT | ☐ Common School Subjects |
| ☐ Contractor and Builder | ☐ Math ematics |
| ☐ Architectural Draftsman | ☐ CIVIL SERVICE |
| ☐ Concrete Builder | ☐ Railway Mail Clerk |
| ☐ Structural Engineer | ☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING |
| ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING | ☐ Auto Repairing |
| ☐ Sheet Metal Worker | ☐ Navigation |
| ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt. | ☐ AGRICULTURE |
| ☐ CHEMIST | ☐ Poultry Raising |

Name _____
Present Occupation _____
Street and No. _____
City _____ State _____

(Canadians may send this coupon to
International Correspondence Schools, Montreal, Canada)

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

\$100.00 A WEEK! We want one well acquainted, ambitious representative in every town to demonstrate and sell a wonderful new life which sells on sight. (Guaranteed 5,000 miles puncture-proof. Over-size easier riding, better looking, and yet they cost only about half as much. We help you establish a substantial, flourishing business of your own, the weekly profits from which will amaze you. We show you how and give you every help. If you are ambitious to build a business of your own and are now making less than \$100.00 a week, wire or write for free particulars at once. Mr. Auger, Sales Manager, 221 Second Street, San Francisco, Calif.

AGENTS—WITH EXPERIENCE, SELL TO CONSUMERS MADE-TO-MEASURE SUITS \$18.50, \$21.00 and \$27.50. Build independent business with big money. Outfits furnished. Midland Tailors, 504 Occidental Building, Chicago.

WANTED—Agents, Male or Female, to sell the wonderful Standard Accounter to merchants, also the most wonderful Farm Accounting System to farmers that the world has ever known. Both of these are simplified books that any ten year old boy can handle. We have sold to date thousands of copies. We want agents in every city. Write us for full information or send four dollars for complete outfit (retail value \$8.00) and go to work. Standard Accounting Forms Co., Fort Wayne, Indiana.

WONDERFUL STARTER FOR FORDS—No Cogs—No Ratchets—Takes no power from engine. Retail \$15.00. Agents collecting money. Exclusive Territory. Simplex Company, Desk A, 9 S. Clinton Street, Chicago.

INSIDE TYRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tyres. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blow outs. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

WE GET THE MONEY—NEARLY EVERY TIME. Rather, our system gets it. District managers, sub agents, side line men—\$40-\$100 weekly picked up. Actually P-I-C-K-E-U-P. Every business man prospect. We protect territory. Write now. Promer Service, 1546 Larrabee, Chicago.

AGENTS—\$50 WEEKLY AND YOUR FALL SUIT FREE. Sell our famous popular priced made to measure suits; b.g. steady income guaranteed. Complete outfit free. Act quick. Commonwealth Tailors, 318 W. Washington Street, Dept. 511, Chicago.

AGENTS: BIG PAY AND FREE AUTOMOBILE introducing wonderful new gasoline saver, punctureproof, five year spark plugs and other economical auto necessities. Outfit free. L. Ballywe, 57 Station F, Louisville, Ky.

\$20.00 DAILY DISTRIBUTING PRIZE PICTURE. "Liberty and Peace," "True Sons of Freedom," "Human Liberty Bell," "Foch," "Pershing," Honor Roll. Enormous demand. Samples free. Also portrait catalog. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1034 W. Adams Street, Chicago.

Miracle Motor-Gas amazes motorists. 3c worth equals gallon gasoline. Eliminates carbon. 300% profit. Isom, Idaho, wires: "Ship 500 packages. Made \$70 yesterday." Samples Free. Chas. A. Butler, Secretary, Dept. 72, Toledo, Ohio.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT made to your own measure? Free and make \$35 to \$50 every week? You can be the best dressed man in your town and earn a lot of extra money if you write at once for our beautiful samples and wonderful offer. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 284, Chicago.

MAKE TWO DOLLARS AN HOUR TAKING ORDERS FOR GOODYEAR fast-selling guaranteed raincoats. Profit in advance. We deliver and collect. Sample coat free. Write for territory. Goodyear Manufacturing Company, 203 Goodyear, Kansas City, Missouri.

AGENTS: SELL GUARANTEED HOSIERY FOR MEN, women and children. Just wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles, colors and fancy stripes. You can sell less than store prices. Write for terms and samples. Thomas Hosiery Co., 3407 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD SOIL. Land in our hardwood district makes you rich. Produces good grains, vegetables, fruit, and stock grows fat. Plenty of rainfall, markets, schools, churches, railroad, etc. Forty thousand acres to choose from in 10, 20, 40, 80 and 160 acre tracts. No taxes to settlers first five years. Free insurance. Every help given settlers. Prices \$15 to \$30 per acre. Easy monthly terms. Write for free booklet. Swigart Land Company, 71245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

\$50 TO \$150 A WEEK, WRITING STORIES. Previous acceptance not essential. Send for Special Free offer. Dept. E, New York Literary Bureau, 145 West 36th St., New York City.

STORIES POEMS PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss. or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

HELP WANTED

RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS; \$110.00 A MONTH TO START and expenses. Travel if desired. Unlimited advancement. No age limit. Three months home study. Situation arranged. Prepare for permanent position. Write for booklet CM30. Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

BECOME DETECTIVES. EARN BIG MONEY. Great demand everywhere. Experience unnecessary. We train you. Excellent opportunities for travel. Write for full particulars. American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, New York.

AMERICAN CITIZENS, 18 TO 60, INCLUDING WOMEN, investigate immediately your rights to government employment. Let me send you Form RK 2001, for free advice. Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis.

AUTO SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalog. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Booklet free. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F St., Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK, HOW TO OBTAIN A PATENT. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F. Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—SEND SKETCH OF YOUR INVENTION for advice regarding patent protection. Twenty years' experience. Hand-book on Patents sent free. Talbert & Talbert, Patent Lawyers, 4735 Talbert Building, Washington, D. C.

STAMPS AND RARE COINS

STAMPS—12 DIFFERENT FROM WARRING NATIONS. 10 cents; 10 different foreign coins, 25 cents; 10 Uruguay Stamps, 10 cents. Lists free. We buy old stamps. Buying list, 10 cents. Toledo Stamp Co., Toledo, Ohio.

TYPEWRITERS

NEW, REBUILT AND SLIGHTLY USED TYPEWRITERS \$8 up. Portable machines \$10 up. Write for our Catalog 24-Q. Beran Typewriter Co., 58 W. Washington St., Chicago.



\$3 AND \$4 WILL BUY

A Beautifully Reconstructed

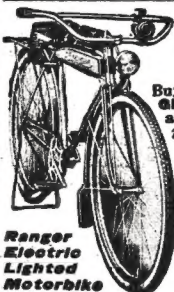
TYPEWRITER

With Every Modern Writing Convenience

WRITE TODAY FOR ILLUSTRATED CIRCULAR

Explaining Try-Before-You-Buy Plan

HARRY A. SMITH, 311-218 North Wells St., Chicago, Ill.



Factory to Rider SAVES YOU MONEY

Buy direct and save \$10 to \$20 on a bicycle. **RANGER BICYCLES** now come in 44 styles, colors and sizes. **WE DELIVER FREE TO you on approval and 30 days' trial** and riding test.

Easy Payments if desired, at a small advance over our special Factory-to-Rider cash prices.

TIRES lamps, wheels, parts and supplies at half usual prices in our Big FREE Catalog.

Do not buy a bicycle, tires, or sundries until you get our wonderful new offer, low factory prices and liberal terms.

MEAD CYCLE COMPANY Dept. T30, Chicago



ONLY \$5.00

A MONTH PAYS FOR THIS SPLENDID DIAMOND RING

Seven perfect-ly matched, blue-white Diamonds, adid-fully mounted in Platinum to resemble one magnificent Solitaire. The Diamonds were selected for their perfect cut, their blue-white color, their superior quality and wonderful brilliancy, by one of our most skilful Diamond experts; together they look like one large, single stone. A most handsome and showy ring for the least amount of money.

SEND NO MONEY — we will send the ring, all charges prepaid—you are sure to be pleased. Pay only \$12.50 on delivery—the balance in ten months: \$1.00 EACH MONTH, until the entire price, \$62.50, has been paid.

OUR PROFIT-SHARING PLAN. Our customers have the benefit of a 7½% increased re-purchase value. Write for particulars—know the House of Sweet.

FREE DE LUXE CATALOG. Learn of our great values—our easy terms of payment—our big variety. Ask for catalog No. 829N and be sure to address Dept. 829N. Liberty Bonds accepted at face value.

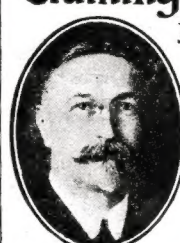
THE HOUSE OF QUALITY

L.W. SWEET & CO. INC.

2-4 MAIDEN LANE, NEW YORK

Training for Authorship

How to write, what to write, and where to sell.



Cultivate your mind. Develop your literary gifts. Master the art of self-expression. Make your spare time profitable. Turn your ideas into dollars.

Courses in Short-Story Writing, Versification, Journalism, Play Writing, Photoplay Writing, etc., taught personally by Dr. J. Berg Esenwein, for many years editor of Lippincott's Magazine, and a staff of literary experts. Constructive criticism. Frank, honest, helpful advice. *Real teaching.*

Dr. Esenwein

One pupil has received over \$5,000 for stories and articles written mostly in spare time—"play work," he calls it. Another pupil received over \$1,000 before completing her first course. Another, a busy wife and mother, is averaging over \$75 a week from photoplay writing alone.

There is no other institution or agency doing so much for writers, young or old. The universities recognize this, for over one hundred members of the English faculties of higher institutions are studying in our Literary Department. The editors recognize it, for they are constantly recommending our courses.

We publish *The Writer's Library*. We also publish *The Writer's Monthly*, especially valuable for its full reports of the literary market. Besides our teaching service, we offer a manuscript criticism service.

150-page illustrated catalogue free.
Please address—

The Home Correspondence School
Dept. 82 Springfield, Mass.

ESTABLISHED 1897 INCORPORATED 1904





Be An Expert Accountant

—The Man Who Directs

Everywhere in business there is need for the man who knows Higher Accounting. To meet the competitive conditions that exist today, waste must be eliminated, accurate cost systems must be installed, economies must be put into effect and the management must have the whole situation charted and shown in figures whenever wanted.

Over 500,000 American concerns today need the services of men who can do this. That shows where opportunity is. Write today for information about the course in Higher Accounting given by LaSalle Extension University.

Learn Higher Accounting By Mail

The LaSalle method will train you by mail under the direct supervision of William B. Castenholz, A. M., C. P. A., former Comptroller and Instructor, University of Illinois, assisted by a staff of Certified Public Accountants including members of the American Institute of Accountants. Analysis and Organization, and the Principles of Accounting, Auditing, Commercial Law and Scientific Management all made clear; and you will be given special preparation for the C. P. A. examinations. You can now learn at home in your spare time while you hold your present position. Pay for the course a little each month if you wish.

LaSalle Students and Graduates

of our various specialized departments can now be found employed by practically all the large railroads and commercial organizations in the United States. For instance—Pennsylvania R. R. 1283, American Telegraph & Telephone Co. 802, U. S. Steel Corporation 808, Baltimore & Ohio R. R. 795, Chicago & N. W. Ry. 506, Swift & Co. 264, Standard Oil Co. 386, Armour & Co. 315.

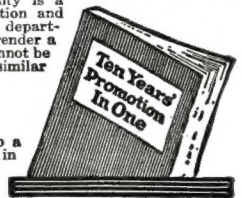
Over 25,000 new students now enroll annually. The LaSalle organization consists of 800 people, including a staff of 300 business experts, professional men, text writers, special lecture writers, instructors and assistants.

Free Consulting Service

As a LaSalle student, you will also be entitled to the free use of our Consulting Service which gives you the privilege of calling on our staff of experts in any department at any time when you need special help or counsel. LaSalle Extension University is a clearing house of business information and through its many highly specialized departments is organized and equipped to render a practical and distinct service which cannot be supplied by any other institution of similar character.

Send Coupon

We will send full particulars, also a free copy of "Ten Years' Promotion in One," a book that has been an inspiration to more than 100,000 ambitious men. Send for your copy now.



LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

"The World's Greatest Extension University"

Dept. 832-H Chicago, Illinois

Without cost or obligation on my part please send me particulars regarding your Home Study Course of Training in Higher Accounting and your valuable book for ambitious men, "Ten Years' Promotion in One."

Name

Present Position

Address

MADE TO ORDER \$1.85
YOUR ORDER SEND NO MONEY

To Prove Our Fine Quality We offer these fine pants for dress or business, many hand-some styles, genuine through and through worsted goods, beautiful narrow weave, smooth silky finish, guaranteed for 2 years solid wear and satisfaction and regular \$5.00 value or **MONEY BACK**. These stylish \$5.00 pants, while they last, only one pair to any customer, by prepaid express, for only **\$1.85**

Cash Profits You can earn a lot of extra money by sending orders for your relatives and neighbors. Young Dave Sheldon made \$12.00 first day and over \$500.00 his first year. Get his own book about it **Free**—also fine tailor book, cloth samples and simple directions. All you to you **Free** with first letter. Just send us your name—**TODAY**.

CHICAGO TAILORS ASS'N.
Dept. P445, 515 S. Franklin St., Chicago

\$1.85
Bays
\$5.00
Value

\$ALARY EASILY DOUBLED

Typewrite the New Way—80 to 100 words per minute guaranteed. Earn \$35 to \$40 weekly. Totally new system. Gives speed and accuracy. Learn at home.

STENOGRAPHERS!

If you want more money in your Pay Envelope write for book, explaining the system. Tells how hundreds of NEW WAY graduates increased their salaries \$300, \$500, \$1000 yearly. **SEND POSTAL TO-DAY FOR FREE COPY.**

THE TULLOSS SCHOOL
6028 College Hill, Springfield, O.

THE NEW WAY IN TYPEWRITING

"Saved \$100.00 On My Diamond"

The \$85 diamond you sent compares favorably to a ring recently bought at \$185 (a saving of \$100).—Name on request. This firm nearly 1/2 century old, rated over \$1,000,000.00, lends money on high grade jewelry. Amazing bargains in unpaid loan diamonds. Free examination.

Why Pay Full Prices

Prove for yourself that it's unnecessary. Send your name for wonderful lists free. Every jewel accurately described in detail. Radically different from catalogs. See these prices before you buy.

Send for Latest List Diamond Loans Must sell unpaid loans. Hundreds of diamonds far under market prices. Free examinations. Amazing bargains proved by customers' letters. Write today.

JOS. DeROY & SONS, 8553 DeRoy Bldg.
Only Opposite Post Office Pittsburgh, Pa.
References: Dun's or Bradstreet's, Marine National Bank; Union Trust Company, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Set in Solid Gold **Set in Solid Gold**

Send Your Name and We'll Send You a Lachnite

DON'T send a penny. Send your name and finger size and say, "Send me a Lachnite mounted in a solid gold ring on 10 days' free trial." We will send it prepaid right to your home. When it comes merely deposit \$4.75 with the postman and then wear the ring for 10 full days. If you, or if any of your friends can tell it from a diamond, send it back. But if you decide to buy it—send \$2.50 a month until \$18.75 has been paid. **Write Today**—Send your name now. Tell us which of the solid gold rings illustrated above you wish (ladies' or men's). Be sure to send your finger size.

Harold Lachman Co., 12 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. C107 Chicago

NO JOKE TO BE DEAF

—Every Deaf Person Knows That

I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with these Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. Write me and I will tell you a true story, how I got deaf and how I make you hear. Address

GEO. P. WAY, Artificial Ear Drum Co. (Inc.)
35 Adelaide St., Detroit, Mich.

Mediated Ear Drum
Pat. Nos. 2, 1908

Mr. Edison's Wonderful New Amberola

Only \$100 and After Trial

Keep the New Edison Amberola—Edison's great phonograph with the diamond stylus—and your choice of records, for only \$1.00. Pay balance at rate of only a few cents a day. Free trial in your own home before you decide to buy. Nothing down. Write for our New Edison Book and pictures, free.

F. K. BABSON, Edison Phonograph Dists., C907 Edison Block, Chicago, Ill.

4-cyl. Lycoming Motor—37 H. P.

For nearly five years the Bush Car has been doing heavy duty all over this country. It's sold by mail only—we do not have distributors. Our Proposition is liberal beyond your expectations. It contains a good selling profit for you. Get ALL the information quick. Write at once to J. H. Bush, Pres., Dept. K-181.

BUSH MOTOR CO.
BUSH TEMPLE, CHICAGO

BUSH PASSENGER CARS

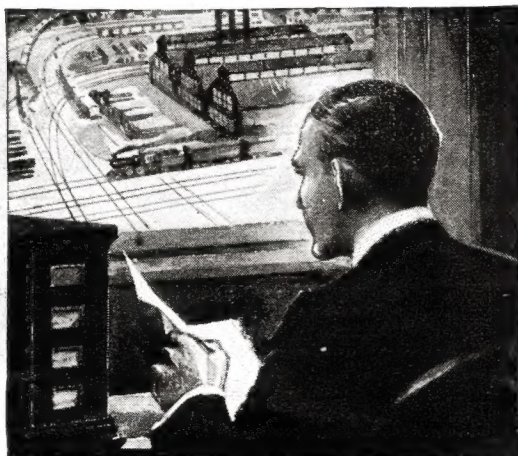
The Bush Car for 1919, in the Light Four is unequalled in value anywhere this year. Think of a car with all the modern refinements which includes in its equipment the Buco Motor Meter, for instance, at prices modest in the extreme. The Bush method of marketing the Bush Motor Car not only gives the owner a better car than he usually gets, but the Bush method of sales gives the user the benefit of high quality at low price. We list below some of the big things—the high grade features—that go into the Bush Car for 1919.

Full Floating Rear Axle
Two Universal Joint Drive
116-Inch Wheel Base
Copper Radiator

Willard Batteries
Timken Roller Bearings
Plate Glass Rear Windows in Top
Light Weight—2450 lbs.
Electric Lighting and Starting (2 unit)

The best material obtainable—the very highest quality construction coupled with what every one knows to be good equipment, such as Willard Batteries and Timken Bearings, insures long life to the Bush Car even under unusually hard service.

There is a **Money-Back Guarantee** Goes with Every Bush Automobile to show you we mean just what we say about the quality of this car and to prove to you that your confidence in us will not be abused. Our Guarantee is in writing.



Earn More As a Traffic Expert

Be the man who knows how to solve the big problems of transportation and you will be one of the men business is searching for. Today's conditions demand expert Traffic men in all great organizations—men who know rates—who know government rulings—who can route merchandise economically—who know how to make claim adjustments—who can give decisions based on accurate traffic knowledge. Big salaries are ready for such men. Important jobs are waiting for those who "know."

Train By Mail

The LaSalle experts will train you as a traffic expert in your spare time—at home for one of these high salaried positions. They will explain practical traffic management in every detail. Rates, Classifications, Tariffs, Bills of Lading, R. R. Organization, Maritime Shipping, Laws of Carriers, Ocean Traffic and Trade, etc., etc., and methods of actual management all made plain. You are under the personal direction of practical traffic men at every step. Every text, every lecture, every examination deals with the identical problems met in business every day. Enrollment also gives you free use of our Consulting Service which makes advice available to you on special business problems whenever you need it.

Get this training while you hold your present position. The fee is small and you can pay on our easy terms—a little each month if you wish.

LaSalle Men Advanced

Advanced from freight checker to General Freight and Passenger Agent. "B. S. M. "Earning capacity increased 400%," H. S. W. "Made 500% profit on investment the first year," F. H. "Three promotions since taking course," R. J. W. "Made Traffic Director of Twin City Traffic League," F. E. C. These are just a few reports picked from the hundreds received from LaSalle men who have taken this course.

Send the Coupon

Your request will bring all the facts about the LaSalle Course in Interstate Commerce and Railway Traffic. Also our valuable book "Ten Years' Promotion in One." Get these facts. Learn what this training offers the ambitious man. Send the coupon today. Catalog and full particulars free.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

"The World's Greatest Extension University"
Dept. 832-IC Chicago, Illinois

Please send me full information on your Course and Consulting Service in Interstate Commerce and Railway Traffic. Also a copy of your valuable book for the ambitious man, "Ten Years' Promotion in One." This without obligation on my part.

Name

Address

Present Position



\$1

Brings This Brilliant Oil Heater



One cent an hour for fuel and you can heat a room with this Brilliant Oil Heater. Carry it from one room to another. Have your heat any place in the house at anytime you want it. 3 quart fount; 21 1/4 inches high. Japanese trimmings. Ventilator top. Easy to regulate. Is strongly built. Will last for many years.

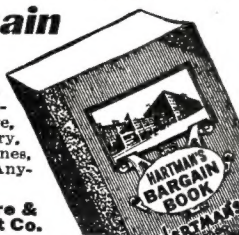
Try It 30 Days

Only \$1.00 and the coupon and we will send this Oil Heater on approval. Use it 30 days. If not absolutely satisfactory send it back and we will refund your \$1.00 and pay transportation both ways. If you keep it, pay on our easy terms. You know how handy an Oil Heater is for chilly days and when you want to warm a room quickly. And here's your chance to get the best made—and on 30 days' trial. So send the coupon today.

Order by No. 354BMA28. Price \$5.99. Send \$1 now. Then pay the balance 75c monthly.

FREE Bargain Catalog

Send post card for this big book. Filled with thousands of bargains in furniture, carpets, rugs, stoves, jewelry, phonographs, sewing machines, farm equipment, etc. Anything sent on easy terms.



HARTMAN Furniture & Carpet Co.

3803 Wentworth Ave., Dept. 1914 Chicago

HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO.

3803 Wentworth Ave., Dept. 1914 Chicago
I enclose \$1. Send me Oil Heater No. 354BMA28. I am to have 30 days' trial. If not satisfied, will ship it back and you will refund my \$1.00 and pay transportation both ways. If I keep it, I will pay 75c a month until the price, \$5.99, is paid.

Name

Address

Occupation

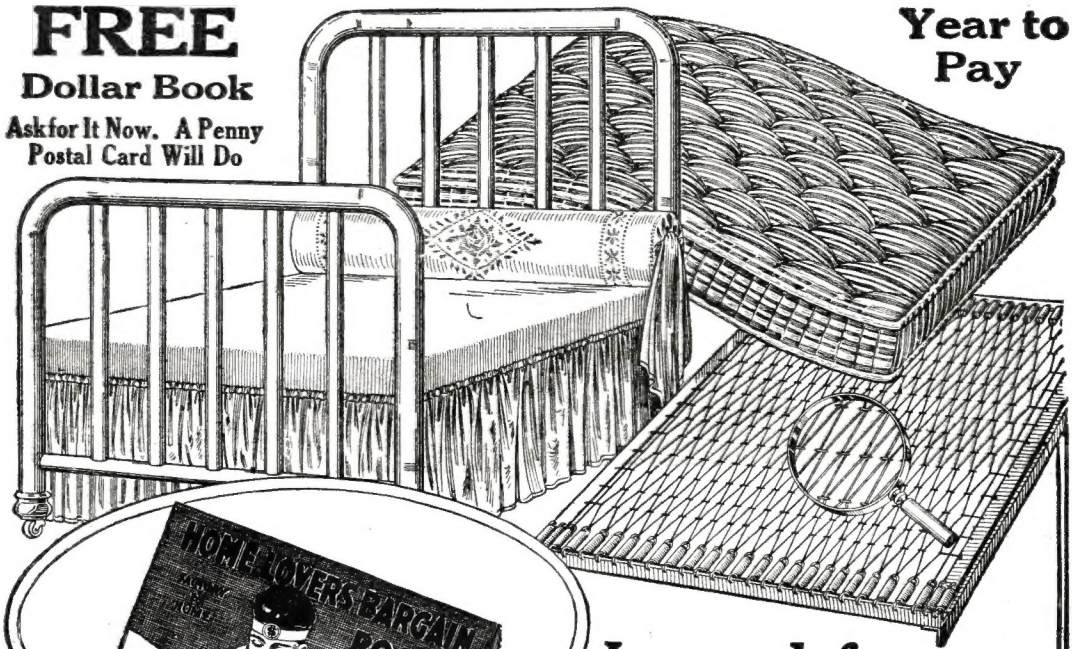
Nearest Shipping Point

FREE

Dollar Book

Ask for It Now. A Penny
Postal Card Will Do

**Year to
Pay**



Loaned for One Whole Month This Bed—Spring—Mattress

This splendid complete bedroom outfit will be sent you for just one dollar deposit—merely by asking for it and mentioning this paper. It is just as easy to order any of our other 10,000 bargains from our big Bargain Book. No red tape; no bother whatever.

For Actual Use

When you receive it—set up this outfit and use it for a whole month. If you return it, the mattress will never be sent out to any one else. We destroy it. Yet we charge you nothing for this month's use. We refund your dollar and we send back any freight charges you have paid and also any hauling expense.

Pay Later If Satisfied

One dollar brings you this bed and only \$2.00 a month pays for it if you keep it. With our book in your home you can have immediately all home comforts. This is a sample bargain. Judge it for quality, completeness, workmanship and price. Don't neglect to send for our Big Free Book. Put any of our 10,000 other bargains to the same test.

Sturdy Steel Bed New colonial design in popular continuous post style. Standard full size, measuring, 4 ft. 6 in. wide. The posts are 1-1/8 in. thick. Five 7-8 in. filling rods are set into the top and lower rails with strong steel husks. Stands 49 in. at head end and 33 in. at foot.

Colors Pure white or popular all-gold Vernis Martin finish.

Guaranteed Spring Splendidly made, unusually strong and will not sag. Angle link fabric fastened to angle steel frame with 27 coiled spiral springs. Fits bed.

Mattress Very comfortable and expertly made. Filled with best combed excelsior, overlaid with clean, fine cotton on top and sides closely tufted and firmly etched. Excellent grade ticking. Order by

No. SB4531 All 3 Pieces, Bed Spring, Mattress **\$19.95**

**Pay
about as
you please**

Double the Old Size—100 Added Pages—10,000 Bargains Furniture for Any Home Anywhere—Long Credit for All

A one cent postal card will bring you this biggest book. Brand new from cover to cover. You ought to have it, no matter where you finally buy. Worlds of information about all grades of furniture; a wonderful guide to prices. Nothing for the home is overlooked or forgotten. Everything from cellar to garret.

The page size is much larger than usual mail order catalogs. Pictures are bigger. Hundreds of things in actual colors, like carpets, rugs, linoleums, blankets, and comforters. A hundred stores could not bring before you such a tremendous display.

**Save By Ordering Now
Pay In Months To Come**

We warn you to make your purchases early, no matter where you buy. Prices will surely be higher—later on. You never need to ask us for credit. We

open your account when we send you our book. We don't care where you live, or how much you earn; or if you are a banker or a laborer. All are welcome to year to pay terms. Never any annoyance or red tape. No collectors. We don't write employers or neighbors.

Doubly Guaranteed Free Loan Offer

Our Free Loan offer is backed by a Legal Guarantee Bond which is doubly guaranteed

by the National Surety Co., a \$2,000,000 concern, whose bond is accepted in any court in the land.

Some of Our Big Departments:

Furniture	Watches	Olecloth
Carpets	Diamonds	Towels
Rugs	Ranges-Stoves	Carpet
Draperies	Sewing	Sweepers
Silverware	Machines	Graphophones
China-ware	Linen	Jewelry
Clocks	Comforters	Wringers
Lamps	Blankets	Washing
Trunks, etc.	Linoleum	Machines

Mail penny postal card today for your free copy

Spiegel, Mau, Stern & Co.
1338 West 35th Street, Chicago

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXI

SATURDAY, AUGUST 9, 1919

No. 1.



Luck

by John Frederick

Author of "The Hammer," "The Higher Strain," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE THUNDERBOLT.

IT seemed that Father Anthony gathered all the warmth of the short northern summer and kept it for winter use, for his good nature was an actual physical force. From his ruddy face beamed such an ardent kindliness that people literally reached out toward him as they might extend their hands toward a comfortable fire.

All the labors of his work as an inspector of Jesuit institutions across the length and breadth of Canada could not lessen the flame of the good father's enthusiasm; his smile was as indefatigable as his critical eyes. The one looked sharply into every corner of a room and every nook and hidden cranny of thoughts and deeds; the other veiled the criticism and soothed the wounds of vanity.

On this day, however, the sharp eyes grew a little less keen and somewhat wider, while that smile was fixed rather by habit than inclination. In fact, his expression might be called a frozen kindliness as he looked across the table to Father Victor.

It required a most indomitable geniality, indeed, to outface the rigid piety of Jean Paul Victor. His missionary work had carried him far north, where the cold burns

men thin. The eternal frost of the arctics lay on his hair, and his starved eyes looked out from hollows shadowed with blue. He might have posed for a painting of one of those damned souls whom Dante placed in the frozen circle of the "Inferno."

It was his own spirit which tortured him—the zeal which drove him north and north and north over untracked regions, drove him until his body failed, drove him even now, though his body was crippled.

A mighty yearning, and a still mightier self-contempt whipped him on, and the school over which he was master groaned and suffered under his régime, and the disciples caught his spirit and went out like warriors in the name of God to spread the faith.

He despised them as he despised himself, for he said continually in his heart: "How great is the purpose and how little is our labor!"

Some such thought as that curled his thin lip as he stared across at Father Anthony like a wolf that has not eaten for a fortnight. The good father sustained the gaze, but he shivered a little and sighed. There was awe, and pity, and even a touch of horror in his eyes.

He said gently: "Are there none among all your lads, dear Father Victor, whom you

find something more than imperfect machines?"

The man of the north drew from a pocket of his robe a letter. His marvelously lean fingers touched it almost with a caress, and when he spoke the softening which could not appear in the rigid features came into his voice and made it lower and deeper.

"One."

Father Anthony started in astonishment, as one might start to hear a divine prophet admit a mistake, but being wise he remained silent, waiting. Jean Paul Victor peered into space.

"Pierre Ryder. He is like a pleasant summer, and I"—he clasped his colorless hands—"am frozen—frozen to the heart."

Still Father Anthony waited, but his eyes were like diamonds for brightness.

"He shall carry on my mission in the north. I, who am silent, have done much; but Pierre sings, and he will do more. I had to fight my first battle to conquer my own stubborn soul, and the battle left me weak for the great work in the snows, but Pierre will not fight that battle, for I have trained him."

He repeated after a pause: "For those who sing forget themselves and their weariness. I, Jean Paul Victor, have never sung."

He bowed his head, submitting to the judgment of God.

"This letter is for him. Shall we not carry it to him? For two days I have not seen Pierre."

Father Anthony winced.

He said: "Do you deny yourself even the pleasure of the lad's company? Alas, Father Victor, you forge your own spurs and goad yourself with your own hands. What harm is there in being often with the lad?"

The sneer returned to the lips of Jean Paul Victor.

"The purpose would be lost—lost to my eyes and lost to his—the purpose for which I have lived and for which he shall live—the purpose to which *you* are dedicated, Gabrielle Antoine Anthony."

He relented in his fierceness, and continued with the strange gentle note in his voice: "Our love for the young, it is like

a vine that climbs through the branches of a strong tree. When the vine is young it may be taken away in safety and both the tree and the vine will live, but if it grows old it will kill the tree when the vine is torn away.

"I am the strong tree, and Pierre has grown into my heart. It is time that he be torn away. He is almost ready. The work is prepared. He must start forth."

Even while he announced his purpose the sweat poured out on his forehead. He rose and paced noiselessly up and down the bare room, his black robe catching around the long, bony legs. Father Anthony drew a great breath. At last Jean Paul Victor could speak again.

"In all the history of our order, there is hardly one man who will go out armed like Pierre Ryder. He is young, he is strong, he is fearless, he is pure of heart and single of mind. He has never tasted wine; he has never looked wrongly on a woman."

"A prodigy—but it is your work."

"Mine—all mine!"

The whole soul of the man stood up in his eyes in a fierce triumph.

"Hear how I worked! When I first saw him he was a child, a baby, but he came to me and took one finger of my hand in his small fist and looked up to me. Ah, Gabrielle, the smile of an infant goes to the heart swifter than the thrust of a knife! I looked down upon him and thought many things, and I knew that I was chosen to teach the child. There was a voice that spoke in me. You will smile, but even now I think I can hear it."

"I swear to you that I believe," said Father Anthony, and his voice trembled.

"Another man would have given Pierre a Bible and a Latin grammar and a cell. I gave him the testament and the grammar; I gave him also the wild north country to say his prayers in and patter his Latin. I taught his mind, but I did not forget his body.

"He is to go out among wild men. He must have strength of the spirit. He must also have a strength of the body that they will understand and respect. How else can he translate for them the truths of the

Holy Spirit? Every day of his life I have made him handle firearms. Other men think, and aim, and fire; Pierre thinks and shoots, and has forgotten how to miss.

"He goes among wild men. These lessons must be learned. He is a soldier of God. He can ride a horse standing; he can run a hundred miles in a day behind a dog-team. He can wrestle and fight with his hands, for I have brought skilled men to teach him. I have made him a thunder-bolt to hurl among the ignorant and the unenlightened; and this is the hand which shall wield it. Ha!"

A flash of cold fire came for a single instant in his eyes as he stood with upturned face. He changed.

"Yet he is gentle as a woman. He goes out through the villages and comes back unharmed, and after him come letters from girls and old men and dames. Even strong men come many miles to see him and they write to him. He is known. It is now hardly a six month since he saved a trapper from a bobcat and killed the animal with a knife."

His heart failed him at the thought, and he murmured: "It must have been my prayers which saved him from the teeth and the claws."

Good Father Anthony rose.

"You have described a young David. I am eager to see him. Let us go."

"Wait. Before you go you must know that he does not suspect that he differs from other youths. Women have looked lewdly upon him and written him letters with singing words, but Pierre being of a simple nature, he answers them briefly and commends them to God. In fact, the flattery of women he does not understand, and the flattery of men he thinks is mere kindness. Are you prepared to meet him, father?"

Father Anthony nodded, and the two went out together. The chill of the open was hardly more than the bitter cold inside the building, but there was a wind that drove the cold through the blood and bones of a man.

They staggered along against it until they came to a small outhouse, long and low. On the sheltered side of it they paused to take breath, and Father Victor

explained: "This is his hour in the gymnasium. To make the body strong required thought and care. Mere riding and running and swinging of the ax will not develop every muscle. So I made this gymnasium, and here Pierre works every day. His teachers of boxing and wrestling have abandoned him."

There was almost a smile on the lean face.

"The last man left with a swollen jaw and limping on one leg."

Conscience-stricken, he stopped short, crossed himself, and then went on: "So I give him for partners men who have committed small sins. Their penance is to stand before Pierre and box each day for a few minutes and then to wrestle against him. They are fierce men, these woodsmen and trappers, and big of body; but little Pierre, they dread him like a whip of fire. One and all, they come to me within a fortnight and beg for an easier penance."

Here he opened the door, and they slipped inside. The air was warmed by a big stove, and the room—for the afternoon was dark—lighted by two swinging lanterns suspended from the low roof. By that illumination Father Anthony saw two men stripped naked, save for a loin-cloth, and circling each other slowly in the center of a ring which was fenced in with ropes and floored with a padded mat. Certainly Father Victor had spared nothing in expense to make the fittings of the gymnasium perfect.

Of the two wrestlers, one was a veritable giant of a Canuck, swarthy of skin, hairy-chested. His great hands were extended to grasp or to parry—his head lowered with a ferocious scowl—and across his forehead swayed a tuft of black, shaggy hair. He might have stood for one of those northern barbarians whom the Romans loved to pit against their native champions in the arena. He was the greater because of the opponent he faced, and it was upon this opponent that the eyes of Father Anthony centered.

Like Father Victor, he was caught first by the bright hair. It was a dark red, and where the light struck it strongly there were places like fire. Down from this hair the light slipped like running water over a lithe

body, slender at the hips, strong-chested, round and smooth of limb, with long muscles everywhere leaping and trembling at every move.

He, like the big Canuck, circled cautiously about, but the impression he gave was as different from the other as day is from night. His head was carried high; in place of a scowl, he smiled with a sort of boyish eagerness, and a light which was partly exultation and partly mischief sparkled in his eyes. Once or twice the giant caught at the other, but David slipped from under the grip of Goliath easily. It seemed as if his skin were oiled. The big man snarled with anger, and lunged more eagerly at Pierre. Father Anthony caught the shoulder of his friend.

"Quick!" he whispered anxiously. "Stop them, for if the black fellow sets his fingers on the boy he will break him like a willow wand, and—in the name of God, Jean Paul!"

For the two, abandoning their feints, suddenly rushed together, and the swarthy arms of the monster slipped around the white body of Pierre. For a moment they whirled, twisting and struggling.

"Now!" murmured Father Victor; and as if in answer to a command, Pierre slipped down, whipped his hands to a new grip, and the two crashed to the mat, with Pierre above.

"Open your eyes, Father Anthony. The lad is safe. How Goliath grunts!"

The boy had not cared to follow his advantage, but rose and danced away, laughing softly. The Canuck floundered up and rushed like a furious bull. His downfall was only the swifter. The impact of the two bodies sounded like hands clapped together, and then Goliath rose into the air, struggling mightily, and pitched with a thud to the mat.

He writhed there, for the wind was knocked from his body by the fall. At length he struggled to a sitting posture and glared up at the conqueror. The boy reached out a hand to his fallen foe.

"You would have thrown me that way the first time," he said, "but you let me change grips on you. In another week you will be too much for me, *bon ami*."

The other accepted the hand after an instant of hesitation and was dragged to his feet. He stood resting one elbow on the gleaming shoulder of Pierre and looking down into the boy's face with a singular grin. But there was no triumph in the eye of Pierre—only a good-natured interest.

"In another week," answered the giant, "there will not be a sound bone in my body. This very night I shall go to Father Victor. I had rather starve for three days in the forest than stand up to you for three minutes, little brother."

CHAPTER II.

IRENE.

"YOU have seen him," murmured the tall priest. "Now let us go back and wait for him. I will leave word."

He touched one of the two or three men who were watching the athletes, and whispered his message in the other's ear. Then he went back with Father Anthony.

"You have seen him," he repeated, when they sat once more in the cheerless room. "Now pronounce on him."

The other answered: "I have seen a wonderful body—but the mind, Father Victor?"

"It is as simple as that of a child—his thoughts run as clear as spring water."

"Ah, but they are swift thoughts. Suppose the spring water gathers up a few stones and rushes on down the side of the mountain. Very soon it is wearing a deeper channel—then but a little space, and it is a raging torrent and tears down great trees from its banks and goes shouting and leaping out toward the sea.

"Suppose a strange thought came in the mind of your Pierre. It would be like the pebbles in the swift-running spring water. He would carry it on, rushing. It would tear away the old boundaries of his mind—it might wipe out the banks you have set down for him—it might tear away the choicest teachings."

Father Victor sat straight and stiff with stern, set lips.

He said dryly: "Father Anthony has been much in the world."

"I speak from the best intention, good father. Look you, now, I have seen that same red hair and those same lighted blue eyes before, and wherever I have seen them has been war and trouble and unrest. I have seen that same whimsical smile which stirs the heart of a woman and makes a man reach for his revolver. This boy whose mind is so clear — arm him with a single wrong thought, with a single doubt of the eternal goodness of God's plans, and he will be a thunderbolt indeed, dear father, but not one which even your strong hand could control."

"I have heard you," said the priest; "but you will see. He is coming now."

There was a knock at the door; then it opened and showed a modest novice in a simple gown of black serge girt at the waist with the flat encircling band. His head was downward; it was not till the blue eyes flashed inquisitively up that Father Anthony recognized Pierre.

The hard voice of Jean Paul Victor pronounced: "This is that Father Anthony of whom I have spoken."

The novice slipped to his knees and folded his hands. The two priests exchanged glances, one of triumph and one of wonder, while the plump fingers of Father Anthony poised over that dark red hair, pressed smooth on top where the skull-cap rested, and curling somewhat at the sides. The blessing which he spoke was Latin, and Father Victor looked somewhat anxiously toward his protégé till the latter answered in a diction so pure that Cicero himself would have smiled to hear it:

"Father, I thank thee, and if my mind were as old as thine I might be able to wish blessings as great as these in return."

"Stand up!" cried Father Anthony. "By Heavens, Jean Paul, it is the purest Latin I have heard this twelvemonth."

And the lad answered: "It must be pure Latin; Father Victor has taught me."

Gabrielle Anthony stared, and to save him from too obvious confusion the other priest interrupted: "I have a letter for you, my son."

And he passed the envelope to Pierre. The latter examined it with interest.

"The writing sprawls like the knees of

a boy of ten. What old man has written to you, Pierre?"

"No man that I know. This comes from the south. It is marked from the United States."

"So far!" exclaimed the tall priest. "Give me the letter, lad."

But here he caught the whimsical eyes of Father Anthony, and he allowed his outstretched hand to fall. Yet he scowled as he said: "No; keep it and read it, Pierre."

"I have no great wish to keep it," answered Pierre, studying anxiously the dark brow of the priest.

"It is yours. Open it and read."

The lad obeyed instantly. He shook out the folded paper and moved a little nearer the light. Then he read aloud, as if it had never entered his mind that what was addressed to him might be meant for his eyes alone. And as he read he reminded Father Anthony of some childish chorister pronouncing words beyond his understanding. The tears came to the eyes of the good father.

And he said in his heart: "Alas! I have been too much in the world of men, and now a child can teach me."

The musical voice of the boy began:

"Morgantown,

"R. F. D. No. 4.

"SON PIERRE:

"Here I lie with a chunk of lead from the gun of Bob McGurk resting somewheres in the insides of me, and there ain't no way of doubting that I'm about to go out. Now, I ain't complaining none. I've had my fling. I've eat my meat to order, well done and rare—mostly rare. Maybe some folks will be saying that I've got what I've been asking for, and I know that Bob McGurk got me fair and square, shooting from the hip. That don't help me none, lying here with a through ticket to some place that's farther south than Texas."

Pierre lowered the letter and looked gravely upon Father Victor.

"There are blasphemies coming. Shall I read on?"

"Yes."

He began again, a little spot of red coming into either cheek:

"Hell ain't none too bad for me, I know. I ain't whining none. I just lie here and watch the world getting dimmer until I begin

to be seeing things out of my past. That shows the devil ain't losing no time with me. But the thing that comes back oftenest and hits me the hardest is the sight of your mother, lying with you in the hollow of her arm and looking up at me and whispering, 'Dad,' just before she wen't out."

The hand of the boy fell, and his wide eyes sought the face of Father Victor. The latter was standing.

"You told me I had no father—"

An imperious arm stretched toward him.

"Give me the letter."

He moved to obey, and then checked himself.

"This is my father's writing, is it not?"

"No, no! It is a lie, Pierre!"

But Pierre stood with the letter held behind his back, and the first doubt in his life stood up darkly in his eyes. Father Victor sank slowly back into his chair. All his gaunt frame was trembling.

"Read on," he commanded.

And Pierre, white of face, read on:

"So I got a idea that I had to write to you, Pierre. There ain't nothing I can make up to you, but knowing the truth may help some. Poor kid, you ain't got no father in the eyes of the law, and neither did you have no mother, and there ain't no name that belongs to you by rights."

Father Anthony veiled his eyes, but the bright, starved eyes of Jean Paul Victor stared on at the reader. His voice was lower now, and the lips moved slowly, as though numb with cold.

"I was a man in them days, and your mother was a woman that brought your heart into your throat and set it singing. She and me, we were too busy being just plain happy to care much what was right or wrong; so you just sort of happened along, Pierre. Me being so close to hell, I remember that her eyes that was bluer than heaven looking up to me, and her hair, that was copper with gold lights in it, ran down across the white of her shoulder, and even past her side and around you, Pierre, till it seemed like you was lying in a red river. She being about all in, she got hold of my hand and looked up to me with them blue eyes I been talking about, and said 'Dad,' and went out. And I damned near followed her.

"I buried Irene on the side of the mountain under a big, rough rock, and I didn't carve nothing on the rock. Then I took you, Pierre, and I knew I wasn't no sort of a man

to raise up the son of Irene; so I brought you to Father Victor on a winter night and left you in his arms. That was after I'd done my best to raise you and you was just about old enough to chatter a bit. There wasn't nothing else to do. My wife, she went pretty near crazy when I brought you home. And she'd of killed you, Pierre, if I hadn't took you away.

"You see, I was married before I met Irene. So there ain't no alibi for me. I just acted the hound. But me being so close to hell now, I look back to that time, and somehow I see no wrong in it still.

"And if I done wrong then, I've got my share of hell-fire for it. Here I lie, with my boys, Bill and Bert, sitting around in the corner of the room waiting for me to go out. They ain't men, Pierre. They're wolves in the skins of men. They're the right sons of their mother. When I go out they'll grab the coin I've saved up, and leave me to lie here and rot, maybe.

"Lad, it's a fearful thing to die without having no one around that cares, and to know that even after I've gone out I'm going to lie here and have my dead eyes looking up at the ceiling. So I'm writing to you, Pierre, part to tell you what you ought to know; part because I got a sort of crazy idea that maybe you could get down here to me before I go out.

"You don't owe me nothing but hard words, Pierre; but if you don't try to come to me, the ghost of your mother will follow you all your life, lad, and you'll be seeing her blue eyes and the red-gold of her hair in the dark of the night as I see it now. Me, I'm a hard man, but it breaks my heart, that ghost of Irene. So here I'll lie, waiting for you, Pierre, and lingering out the days with whisky, and fighting the wolf eyes of them there sons of mine. If I weaken—if they find they can look me square in the eye—they'll finish me quick, and make off with the coin. Pierre, come quick.

"MARTIN RYDER."

The hand of Pierre dropped slowly to his side, and the letter fluttered with a crisp rustling to the floor.

CHAPTER III.

THE LAUNCHING OF THE BOLT.

THEN came a voice that startled the two priests, for it seemed that a fourth man had entered the room, so changed was it from the musical voice of Pierre.

"Father Victor, the roan is a strong horse. May I take him?"

"Pierre!" and the priest reached out his bony hands.

But the boy did not seem to notice or to understand.

"It is a long journey, and I will need a strong horse. It must be eight hundred miles to that town."

"Pierre, what claim has he upon you? What debt have you to repay?"

And Pierre le Rouge answered: "He loved my mother."

He raised his face a little higher and smiled upon them.

"It is a beautiful name, is it not—Irene?"

There was no voice from Jean Paul Victor, so he turned to Father Anthony.

"It is a charming name, Pierre."

"I would give my revolver with the pearl handle, and my skates, and the engraved knife of old Canole just for one glimpse of her."

"You are going?"

The boy asked in astonishment: "Would you not have me go, father?"

And Jean Paul Victor could not meet the sorrowful blue eyes.

He bowed his head and answered: "My child, I would have you go. But promise with your hand in mine that you will come back to me when your father is buried."

The lean fingers caught the extended hand of Pierre and froze about it.

"But first I have a second duty in the southland."

"A second?"

"You taught me to shoot and to use a knife. Once you said: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' Father Victor, my father was killed by another man."

"Pierre, dear lad, swear to me here on this cross that you will not raise your hands against the murderer. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'"

"He must have an instrument for his wrath. He shall work through me in this."

"Pierre, you blaspheme."

"'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'"

"It was the demon in me that quoted that in your hearing, and not myself."

"The horse, Father Victor—may I have the roan?"

"Pierre, I command you—"

The light in the blue eyes was as cold and steady as that in the starved eyes of Jean Paul Victor.

"Hush!" he said calmly. "For the sake of the love that I bear for you, do not command me."

"Pierre, I have prayed God for you night and morning, and for the sake of those prayers which are dearer than gold in heaven, stay with me!"

"Dear Father Victor, you also hope for hands that love you to close your eyes at the end."

And the stern priest dropped his head. He said at last: "I have nothing saving one great and terrible treasure which I see was predestined to you. It is the cross of Father Meilan. You have worn it before. You shall wear it hereafter as your own."

He took from his own neck a silver cross suspended by a slender silver chain, and the boy, with startled eyes, dropped to his knees and received the gift.

"It has brought good to all who possessed it, but for every good thing that it works for you it will work evil on some other. Great is its blessing and great is its burden. I, alas, know; but you also have heard its history. Do you accept it, Pierre?"

"Dear father, with all my heart."

The colorless hands touched the dark-red hair, and the prophet eyes of the priest went up.

"God pardon the sins you shall commit."

Pierre crushed the hand of Jean Paul Victor against his lips and rushed from the room, while the tall priest, staring down at the fingers which had been kissed, pronounced:

"It is better that he should commit murder with his hands than to slay in his evil thoughts."

"Can you resign him like this?"

"I have forged a thunderbolt. Father Gabrielle, you are a prophet. It is too great for my hand. Listen!"

And they heard clearly the sharp clang of a horse's hoofs on the hard-packed snow, loud at first, but fading rapidly away. The wind, increasing suddenly, shook the house furiously about them.

It was a north wind, and traveled south

before the rider of the strong roan. Over a thousand miles of plain and hills it passed, and down into the cattle country of the mountain-desert which the Rockies hem on one side and the tall Sierras on the other.

It was a trail to try even the endurance of Pierre and the strong roan, but the boy clung to it doggedly. On a trail that led down from the edges of the northern mountains the roan crashed to the ground in a plunging fall, hitting heavily on his knees. He was dead before the boy had freed his feet from the stirrups.

Pierre threw the saddle over his shoulder and walked eight miles to the nearest ranch-house, where he spent practically the last cent of his money on another horse, and drove on south once more.

There was little hope in him as day after day slipped past. Only the ghost of a chance remained that Martin Ryder could fight away death for another fortnight; yet Pierre had seen many a man from the mountain-desert stave off the end through weeks and weeks of the bitterest suffering. His father must be a man of the same hard, durable metal, and upon that Pierre staked all his hopes.

And always he carried the picture of the dying man alone with his two wolf-eyed sons who waited for his eyes to weaken. Whenever he thought of that he touched his horse with the spurs and rode fiercely for a time. They were his flesh and blood, the man, and even the two wolf-eyed sons.

So he came at last to a gap in the hills and looked down on Morgantown in the hollow, twoscore unpainted houses sprawling along a single street. The snow was everywhere white and pure, and the town was like a stain on the landscape with wisps of smoke rising and trailing across the hill-tops.

Down to the edge of the town he rode, left his cow-pony standing with hanging head outside a saloon, strode through the swinging doors, and asked of the bartender the way to the house of Martin Ryder.

The bartender stopped in his labor of rubbing down the surface of his bar and stared at the black-serge robe of the stranger, with curiosity rather than criticism, for women, madmen, and clergymen

have the right-of-way in the mountain-desert.

He said: "Well, I'll be damned!—askin' your pardon. So old Mart Ryder has come down to this, eh? Partner, you're sure going to have a rough ride getting Mart to heaven. Better send a posse along with him, because some first-class angels are going to get considerable riled when they sight him coming. Ha, ha, ha! Sure I'll show you the way. Take the northwest road out of town and go five miles till you see a broken-backed shack lyin' over to the right. That's Mart Ryder's place."

Out to the broken-backed shack rode Pierre le Rouge, Pierre the Red, as every one in the north country knew him. His second horse, stanch cow-pony that it was, stumbled on with sagging knees and hanging head, but Pierre rode upright, at ease, for his mind was untired.

Broken-backed indeed was the house before which he dismounted. The roof sagged from end to end, and the stove-pipe chimney leaned at a drunken angle. Nature itself was withered beside that house; before the door stood a great cottonwood, gashed and scarred by lightning, with the limbs almost entirely stripped away from one side. Under this broken monster Pierre stepped and through the door. Two growls like the snarls of watch-dogs greeted him, and two tall, unshaven men barred his way.

Behind them, from the bed in the corner, a feeble voice called: "Who's there?"

"In the name of God," said the boy gravely, for he saw a hollow-eyed specter staring toward him from the bed in the corner, "let me pass! I am his son!"

It was not that which made them give back, but a shrill, faint cry of triumph from the sick man toward which they turned. Pierre slipped past them and stood above Martin Ryder. He was wasted beyond belief—only the monster hand showed what he had been.

"Son?" he queried with yearning and uncertainty.

"Pierre, your son."

And he slipped to his knees beside the bed. The heavy hand fell upon his hair and stroked it.

"There ain't no ways of doubting it.

It's red silk, like the hair of Irene. Seein' you, boy, it ain't so hard to die. Look up! So; Pierre, my son! Are you scared of me, boy?"

"I'm not afraid."

"Not with them eyes you ain't. Now that you're here, pay the coyotes and let 'em go off to gnaw the bones."

He dragged out a small canvas bag from beneath the blankets and gestured toward the two lurkers in the corner.

"Take it, and be damned to you!"

A dirty, yellow hand seized the bag; there was a chortle of exultation, and the two scurried out of the room.

"Three weeks they've watched an' waited for me to go out, Pierre. Three weeks they've waited an' sneaked up to my bed an' sneaked away agin', seein' my eyes open."

Looking into their fierce fever brightness, Pierre understood why they had quailed. For the man, though wrecked beyond hope of living, was terrible still. The thick, gray stubble on his face could not hide altogether the hard lines of mouth and jaw, and on the wasted arm the hand was grotesquely huge. It was horror that widened the eyes of Pierre as he looked at Martin Ryder; it was a grim happiness that made his lips almost smile.

"You've taken holy orders, lad?"

"No."

"But the black dress?"

"I'm only a novice. I've sworn no vows."

"And you don't hate me—you hold no grudge against me for the sake of your mother, Pierre?" He took the heavy hand.

"Are you not my father? And my mother was happy with you. For her sake I love you."

"The good Father Victor. He sent you to me."

"I came of my own will. He would not have let me go."

"He—he would have kept my flesh and blood away from me?"

"Do not reproach him. He would have kept me from a sin."

"Sin? By God, boy, no matter what I've done, is it sin for my son to come to me? What sin?"

"The sin of murder!"

"Ha!"

"I have come to find McGurk."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CORNER PLOT.

LIKE some old father-bear watching his cub bare teeth against a stalking lynx, half proud and half fearful of such courage, so the dying cattleman looked at his son. Excitement set a high and dangerous color in his cheek. His eyes were too bright.

"Pierre—brave boy! Look at me. I ain't no imitation-man, even now, but I ain't a ghost of what I was. There wasn't no man I wouldn't of met fair and square with bare hands or with a gun. Maybe my hands was big, but they were fast on the draw. I've lived all my life with iron on the hip, and my six-gun has seven notches.

"But McGurk downed me fair and square. There wasn't no murder. I was out for his hide, and he knew it. I done the provokin', an' he jest done the finishin', that was all. It hurts me a lot to say it, but he's a better man than I was. A kid like you, why, he'd jest eat you, Pierre."

Pierre le Rouge smiled again. He felt a stern and aching pride to be the son of this man.

"So that's settled," went on Martin Ryder, "an' a damned good thing it is. Son, you didn't come none too soon. I'm goin' out fast. There ain't enough light left in me so's I can see my own way. Here's all I ask: When I die touch my eyelids soft an' draw 'em shut—I've seen the look in a dead man's eyes. Close 'em, and I know I'll go to sleep an' have good dreams. And down in the middle of Morgantown is the buryin'-ground. I've ridden past it a thousand times an' watched a corner plot, where the grass grows quicker than it does anywheres else in the cemetery. Pierre, I'd die plumb easy if I knew I was goin' to sleep the rest of time in that place."

"It shall be done."

"But that corner plot, it would cost a pile, son. And I've no money. I gave what I had to them wolf-eyed boys, Bill an' Bert. Money was what they wanted,

an' after I had Irene's son with me, money was the cheapest way of gettin' rid of 'em."

"I'll buy the plot."

"Have you got that much money, lad?"

"Yes," lied Pierre calmly.

The bright eyes grew dimmer and then fluttered close. Pierre started to his feet, thinking that the end had come. But the voice began again, fainter, slowly:

"No light left inside of me, but dyin' this way is easy. There ain't no wind will blow on me after I'm dead, but I'll be blanketed safe from head to foot in cool, sweet-smellin' sod—the kind that has tangles of the roots of grass. There ain't no snow will reach to me where I lie. There ain't no sun will burn down to me. Dyin' like that is jest—goin' to sleep."

After that he said nothing for a time, and the late afternoon darkened slowly through the room.

As for Pierre, he did not move, and his mind went back. He did not see the bearded wreck who lay dying before him, but a picture of Irene, with the sun lighting her copper hair with places of burning gold, and a handsome young giant beside her. They rode together on some upland trail at sunset time, sharply framed against the bright sky. Their hands were together; their faces were raised; they laughed, from the midst of their small heaven.

There was a whisper below him: "Irene!"

And Pierre looked down to blankly staring eyes. He groaned, and dropped to his knees.

"I have come for you," said the whisper, "because the time has come, Irene. We have to ride out together. We have a long ways to go. Are you ready?"

"Yes," said Pierre.

"Thank God! It's a wonderful night. The stars are asking us out. Quick! Into your saddle. Now the spurs. So! We are alone and free, with the winds around us, and all that we have been forgotten behind us. Irene, look up with me!"

The eyes opened wide and stared up; without a stir in the great, gaunt body he was dead. Pierre drew the eyes reverently shut. There were no tears in his eyes, but

a feeling of hollowness about his heart, and a great pain. He straightened and looked about him and found that the room was quite dark.

So in the dimness Pierre fumbled, by force of habit, at his throat, and found the cross which he wore by a silver chain about his throat. He held it in a great grip and closed his eyes and prayed. When he opened his eyes again it was almost deep night in the room, and Pierre had passed from youth to manhood. Through the gloom nothing stood out distinctly save the white face of the dead man, and from that Pierre looked quickly away.

One by one he numbered his obligations to Martin Ryder, and first and last he remembered the lie which had soothed his father. The money for that corner plot where the grass grew first in the spring of the year—where was he to find it? He fumbled in his pocket and found only a single coin.

He leaned back against the wall and strove to concentrate on the problem, but his thoughts wandered in spite of himself back to the snows of Canada, to the letter, to the ride south, the death of the roan, and so on until he reached his entry to that very room.

Looking backward, he remembered all things much more clearly than when he had actually seen them. For instance, he recalled now that as he walked through the door the two figures which had started up to block his way had left behind them some playing-cards at the corner table. One of these cards had slipped from the edge of the board and flickered slowly to the floor.

With that memory the thoughts of Pierre le Rouge stopped. The picture of the falling card remained; all else went out in his mind like the snuffing of the candle. Then, as if he heard a voice directing him through the utter blackness of the room, he knew what he must do.

All his wealth was the single half-dollar piece in his pocket, and there was only one way in which that coin could be increased to the sum he would need to buy that corner plot, where the soul of old Martin Ryder could sleep long and deep.

From his brothers he would get no help. The least memory of those sallow, hungry faces convinced him of that.

There remained the gaming table. In the north country he had watched men sit in a silent circle, smoking, drinking, with the flare of an oil-lamp against deep, seamed faces, and only the slip and whisper of card against card.

Cold conscience tapped the shoulder of Pierre, remembering the lessons of Father Victor, but a moment later his head went up and his eyes were shining through the dark. After all, the end justified the means. It was typical of him that sorrow sat lightly on him.

A moment later he was laughing softly as a boy in the midst of a prank, and busily throwing off the robe of serge. Fumbling through the night he located the shirt and overalls he had seen hanging from a nail on the wall. Into these he slipped, leaned to kiss the chill, damp forehead of the sleeper, and then went out under the open sky.

The rest had revived the strength of the tough little cow-pony, and he drove on at a gallop toward the twinkling lights of Morgantown. There was a new consciousness about Pierre as if he had changed his whole nature with his clothes. The sober sense of duty which had kept him in awe all his life like a lifted finger, was almost gone, and in its place was a joyous freedom.

For the first time he faintly realized what an existence other than that of a priest might be. Now for a brief moment he could forget the part of the subdued novice and become merely a man with nothing about him to distinguish him from other men, nothing to make heads turn at his approach and raise whispers as he passed.

It was a game, but he rejoiced in it as a girl does in her first masquerade. Tomorrow he must be grave and sober-footed and an example to other men; to-night he could frolic as he pleased. The good Father Victor would hear and frown, perhaps, but remembering the purpose for which the thing was done he would forgive.

So Pierre le Rouge tossed back his head

and laughed up to the frosty stars. The loose sleeves and the skirts of the robe no longer entangled his limbs. He threw up his arms and shouted. A hillside caught the sound and echoed it back to him with a wonderful clearness, and up and down the long ravine beat the clatter of the flying hoofs. The whole world shouted and laughed and rode with him on Morgantown.

If the people in the houses that he passed had known they would have started up from their chairs and taken rifle and horse and after him on the trail. But how could they tell from the passing of those ringing hoofs that Pierre, the novice, was dead, and Red Pierre was born?

So they drowsed on about their comfortable fires, and Pierre drew rein with a jerk before the largest of Morgantown's saloons. With a hand on the swinging doors he paused a breathless moment, thinking, doubting, wondering—and a little cold of heart like the boy who stands on the bank of the river to take the first plunge in the spring of the year. He had to set his teeth before he could summon the resolution to throw open the door. It was done; he stepped inside, and stood blinking in the sudden rush of light against his face.

It was all bewildering at first; the radiance, the blue tangle of smoke, the storm of voices. For Muldoon's was packed from door to door. Coins rang in a steady chorus along the bar, and the crowd waited three and four deep.

Some one was singing a rollicking song of the range at one end of the bar, and a chorus of four bellowed a profane parody at the other end.

The ears of Pierre le Rouge tingled hotly, and he lowered his eyes to the floor. Truly, Father Victor would be very wrath when all this was confessed. Partly to escape this uproar he worked his way to the quieter room at the back of the saloon.

It was almost as crowded as the bar, but here no one spoke except for an occasional growl. Sudden speaking, and a loud voice, indeed, was hardly safe. Some one cursed at his ill-luck as Pierre entered, and a dozen hands reached for six-guns. In such a place one had to be prepared.

Pierre remembered with quick dismay that he was not armed. All his life the straight black gown had been weapon enough to make all men give way before him. Now he carried no borrowed strength upon his shoulders.

Automatically he slipped his fingers under the breast of his shirt until their tips touched the cold metal of the cross. That gave him stronger courage. The joy of the adventure made his blood warm again as he drew out his one coin and looked for a place to start his venture.

"It is God who governs me," he said, "and why should I doubt Him?"

So he approached the nearest table. On the surface of it were marked six squares with chalk, and each with its appropriate number. The man who ran the game stood behind the table and shook three dice. The numbers which turned up paid the gambler. The numbers which failed to show paid the owner of the game.

His luck had been too strong that night, and now only two men faced him, and both of them lost persistently. They had passed the stage of intelligent gaming; they were "bucking" the dice with savage stubbornness.

Pierre edged closer, shut his eyes, and deposited his coin. When he looked again he saw that he had wagered on the five.

CHAPTER V.

HURLEY.

THE dice clattered across the table and were swept up by the hand of the man behind the table before Pierre could note them. Sick at heart, he began to turn away, as he saw that hand reach out and gather in the coins of the other two bettors. It went out a third time and laid another fifty-cent piece upon his. The heart of Pierre bounded up to his throat.

Again the dice rolled, and this time he saw distinctly two fives turn up. Two dollars in silver were dropped upon his, and still he let the money lie. Again, again, and again the dice rolled. And now there were pieces of gold among the silver that covered the square of the five.

The other two looked askance at him, and the owner of the game growled: "Gimme room for the coins, stranger, will you?"

Pierre picked up his winnings. In his left hand he held them, and the coins brimmed his cupped palm. With the free hand he placed his new wagers. But he lost now.

"I cannot win forever," thought Pierre, and redoubled his bets in an effort to regain the lost ground.

Still his little fortune dwindled, till the sweat came out on his forehead and the blood that had flushed his face ran back and left him pale with dread. And at last there remained only one gold piece. He hesitated, holding it poised for the wager, while the owner of the game rattled the dice loudly and looked up at the coin with hungry eyes.

Once more Pierre closed his eyes and laid his wager, while his empty left hand slipped again inside his shirt and touched the metal of the cross, and once more when he opened his eyes the hand of the gambler was going out to lay a second coin over his.

"It is the cross!" thought Pierre, and thrilled mightily. "It is the cross which brings me luck."

The dice rattled out. He won. Again, and still he won. The gambler wiped his forehead and looked up anxiously. For these were wagers in gold, and the doubling stakes were running high. About Pierre a crowd had grown—a dozen cattlemen who watched the growing heap of gold with silent fascination. Then they began to make wagers of their own, and there were faint whispers of wrath and astonishment as the dice clicked out and each time the winnings of Pierre doubled.

Suddenly the dealer stopped and held up his left hand as a warning. With his right, very slowly, inch by inch lest any one should suspect him of a gun play, he drew out a heavy forty-five and laid it on the table with the belt of cartridges.

"Three years she's been on my hip through thick and thin, stranger. Three years she's shot close an' true. There ain't a butt in the world that hugs your hand

tighter. There ain't a cylinder that spins easier. Shoot? Lad, even a kid like you could be 'a killer with that six-gun. What will you lay ag'in' it?"

And his red-stained eyes glanced covetously at the yellow heap of Pierre's money.

"How much?" said Pierre eagerly. "Is there enough on the table to buy the gun?"

"Buy?" said the other fiercely. "There ain't enough coin west of the Rockies to buy that gun. D'you think I'm yaller hound enough to sell my six? No, but I'll risk it in a fair bet. There ain't no disgrace in that; eh, pals?"

There was a chorus of low grunts of assent.

"All right," said Pierre. "That pile against the gun."

"All of it?"

"All."

"Look here, kid, if you're tryin' to play a charity game with me—"

"Charity?"

The direct, frank surprise of that look disarmed the other. He swept up the dice-box, and shook it furiously, while his lips stirred. It was as if he murmured an incantation for success. The dice rolled out, winking in the light, spun over, and the owner of the gun stood with both hands braced against the edge of the table, and stared hopelessly down.

A moment before his pockets had sagged with a precious weight, and there had been a significant drag of the belt over his right hip. Now both burdens were gone.

He looked up with a short laugh.

"I'm dry. Who'll stake me to a drink?"

Pierre scooped up a dozen pieces of the gold.

"Here."

The other drew back.

"You're very welcome to it. Here's more, if you'll have it."

"The coin I've lost to you? Take back a gamblin' debt?"

"Easy there," said one of the men.

"Don't you see the kid's green? Here's a five-spot."

The loser accepted the coin as carelessly as if he were conferring a favor by taking it, cast another scowl in the direction of Pierre, and went out toward the bar. Pierre,

very hot in the face, pocketed his winnings and belted on the gun. It hung low on his thigh, just in easy gripping distance of his hand, and he fingered the butt with a smile.

"The kid's feelin' most a man," remarked a sarcastic voice. "Say, kid, why don't you try your luck with Mac Hurley? He's almost through with poor, old Cochrane."

Following the direction of the pointing finger, Pierre saw one of those mute tragedies of the gambling hall. Cochrane, an old cattleman whose carefully trimmed, pointed white beard and slender, tapering fingers set him apart from the others in the room, was rather far gone with liquor. He was still stiffly erect in his chair, and would be till the very moment consciousness left him, but his eyes were misty, and when he spoke the fine-cut lips moved slowly, as though numbed by cold.

Beside him stood a tall, black bottle with a little whisky glass to flank it. He made his bets with apparent carelessness, but with a real and deepening gloom. Once or twice he glanced up sharply as though reckoning his losses, though it seemed to Pierre le Rouge almost like an appeal.

And what appeal could affect Mac Hurley? There was no color in the man, either body or soul. No emotion could show in those pale, small eyes or change the color of the flabby cheeks. If his hands had been cut off he might have seemed some sodden victim of a drug habit, but the hands saved him.

They seemed to belong to another body—beautiful, swift, and strong, and grafted by some foul mischance onto this rotten hulk. Very white they were, and long, with a nervous uneasiness in every motion, continually hovering around the cards with little touches which were almost caresses.

"It ain't a game," said the man who had first pointed out the group to Pierre, "it's just a slaughter. Cochrane's too far gone to see straight. Look at that deal now! A kid could see that he's crooking the cards!"

It was Blackjack, and Hurley, as usual, was dealing. He dealt with one hand, flipping the cards out with a snap of the wrist,

the fingers working rapidly over the pack. Now and then he glanced over to the crowd, as if to enjoy their admiration of his skill. He was showing it now, not so much by the deftness of his cheating as by the openness with which he exposed his tricks.

As the stranger remarked to Pierre, a child could have discovered that the cards were being dealt at will from the top and the bottom of the pack, but the gambler was enjoying himself by keeping his game just open enough to be apparent to every other man in the room—just covert enough to deceive the drink-misted brain of Cochrane. And the pale, swinish eyes twinkled as they stared across at the dull sorrow of the old man. There was an ominous sound from Pierre:

"Do you let a thing like that happen in this country?" he asked fiercely.

The other turned to him with a sneer.

"Let it happen? Who'll stop him? Say, partner, you ain't meanin' to say that you don't know who Hurley is?"

"I don't need telling. I can see."

"What you can't see means a lot more than what you can. I've been in the same room when Hurley worked his gun once. It wasn't any killin', but it was the prettiest bit of cheatin' I ever seen. But even if Hurley wasn't enough, what about Carl Diaz?"

He glared his triumph at Pierre, but the latter was too puzzled to quail, and too stirred by the pale, gloomy face of Cochrane to turn toward the other.

"What of Diaz?"

"Look here, boy. You're a kid, all right, but you ain't that young. D'you mean to say that you ain't heard of Carlos Diaz?"

It came back to Pierre then, for even into the snow-bound seclusion of the north country the shadow of the name of Diaz had gone. He could not remember just what they were, but he seemed to recollect grim tales through which that name figured.

The other went on: "But if you ain't ever seen him before, look him over now. They's some says he's faster on the draw than Bob McGurk, but, of course, that's stretchin' him out a size too much. What's the matter, kid: you've met McGurk?"

"No, but I'm going to."

"Might even be carried to him, eh—feet first?"

Pierre turned and laid a hand on the shoulder of the other.

"Don't talk like that," he said gently. "I don't like it."

The other reached up to snatch the hand from his shoulder, but he stayed his arm.

He said after an uncomfortable moment of that silent staring: "Well, partner, there ain't a hell of a lot to get sore over, is there? You don't figure you're a mate for McGurk, do you?"

He seemed oddly relieved when the eyes of Pierre moved away from him and returned to the figure of Carlos Diaz. The Mexican was a perfect model for a painting of a melodramatic villain. He had waxed and twirled the end of his black mustache so that it thrust out a little spur on either side of his long face. His habitual expression was a scowl; his habitual position was with a cigarette in the fingers of his left hand, and his right hand resting on his hip.

He sat in a chair directly behind that of Hurley, and Pierre's new-found acquaintance explained: "He's the bodyguard for Hurley. Maybe there's some who could down Hurley in a straight gun fight; maybe there's one or two like McGurk that could down Diaz—damn his yellow hide—but there ain't no one can buck the two of 'em. It ain't in reason. So they play the game together. Hurley works the cards and Diaz covers up the retreat. Can't beat that, can you?"

Pierre le Rouge slipped his left hand once more inside his shirt until the fingers touched the cross.

"Nevertheless, that game has to stop."

"Who'll—say, kid, are you stringin' me, or are you drunk? Look me in the eye!"

CHAPTER VI.

FEAR.

PIERRE turned and looked calmly upon the other.

And the man whispered in a sort of awe: "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Stand aside!"

The other fell back a pace, and Pierre went straight to the table and said to Cochrane: "Sir, I have come to take you home."

The old man looked up and rubbed his eyes as though waking from a sleep.

"Stand back from the table!" warned Hurley.

"By the Lord, have they been missing me?" queried old Cochrane.

"You are waited for," answered Pierre le Rouge, "and I've been sent to take you home."

"If that's the case—"

"It ain't the case. The kid's lying."

"Lying?" repeated Cochrane, as if he had never heard the word before, and he peered with clearing eyes toward Pierre. "No, I think this boy has never lied."

Silence had spread through the place like a vapor. Even the slight sounds in the gaming-room were done now, and one pair after another of eyes swung toward the table of Cochrane and Hurley. The wave of the silence reached to the barroom. No one could have carried the tidings so soon, but the air was surcharged with the consciousness of an impending crisis.

Half a dozen men started to make their way on tiptoe toward the back room. One stood with his whisky glass suspended in mid air, and tilted back his head to listen. In the gaming-room Hurley pushed back his chair and leaned to the left, giving him a free sweep for his right hand. The Mexican smiled with a slow and deep content.

"Thank you," answered Pierre, "but I am waiting still, sir."

The left hand of Hurley played impatiently on the table.

He said: "Of course, if you have enough—"

"I—enough?" flared the old aristocrat.

Pierre le Rouge turned fairly upon Hurley.

"In the name of God," he said calmly, and God on his lips was as gentle as music, "make an end of your game. You're playing for money, but I think this man is playing for his eternal soul."

The solemn, bookish phraseology came smoothly from his tongue. He knew no other. It drew a murmur of amusement from the room and a snarl from Hurley.

"Put on skirts, kid, and join the Salvation Army, but don't get yourself messed all up in here. This is my party, and I'm damned particular who I invite! Now, run along!"

The head of Pierre tilted back, and he burst into laughter which troubled even Hurley.

The gambler blurted: "What's happening to you, kid?"

"I've been making a lot of good resolutions, Mr. Hurley, about keeping out of trouble; but here I am in it up to the neck."

"No trouble as long as you keep your hand out of another man's game, kid."

"That's it. I can't see you rob Mr. Cochrane like this. You aren't gambling—you're digging gold. The game stops now."

It was a moment before the crowd realized what was about to happen; they saw it reflected first in the face of Hurley, which suddenly went taut and pale, and then, even as they looked with a smile of curiosity and derision toward Pierre le Rouge, they saw and understood.

For the moment Pierre said, "The game stops now," the calm which had been with him was gone. It was like the scent of blood to the starved wolf. The last word was scarcely off his tongue when he was crouched with a devil of green fury in his eyes—the light struck his hair into a wave of flame—his face altered by a dozen ugly years.

"D'you mean?" whispered Hurley, as if he feared to break the silence with his full voice.

"Get out of the room."

And the impulse of Hurley, plainly enough, was to obey the order, and go anywhere to escape from that relentless stare. His glance wavered and flashed around the circle and then back to Red Pierre, for the expectancy and the alertness of all the crowd forced him back.

When the leader of the pack springs and fails to kill, the rest of the pack tear him to pieces. Remembering this, Mac Hurley forced his glance back to Pierre. Moreover, there was a soft voice from behind, and he remembered Diaz.

All this had taken place in the length of time that it takes a heavy body to totter

on the brink of a precipice or a cat to regain its feet after a fall. After the voice of Dan there was a sway through the room, a pulse of silence, and then three hands shot for their hips—Pierre, Diaz, and Hurley.

No stop-watch could have caught the differing lengths of time which each required for the draw. The muzzle of Hurley's revolver was not clear of the holster—the gun of Diaz was nearly at the level when Pierre's weapon exploded at his hip. The bullet cut through the wrist of Hurley. Never again would that slender, supple hand fly over the cards, doing things other than they seemed. He made no effort to escape from the next bullet, but stood looking down at his broken wrist; horror for the moment gave him a dignity oddly out of place with his usual appearance. He alone in all the room was moveless.

The crowd, undecided for an instant, broke for the doors at the first shot; Pierre le Rouge, pitched to the floor as Diaz leaped forward, the revolver in either hand spitting lead and fire.

It was no bullet that downed Pierre but his own cunning. He broke his fall with an outstretched left hand, while the bullets of Diaz pumped into the void space which his body had filled a moment before.

Lying there at ease, he leveled the revolver, grinning with the mirthless lust of battle, and fired over the top of the table. The guns dropped from the hands of huge Diaz. He caught at his throat and staggered back the full length of the room, crashing against the wall. When he pitched forward on his face he was dead before he struck the floor.

Pierre, now Red Pierre, indeed, rose and ran to the fallen man, and, looking at the bulk of the giant, he wondered with a cold heart. He knew before he slipped his hand over the breast of Diaz that this was death. Then he rose again and watched the still fingers which seemed to be gripping at the boards.

These he saw, and nothing else, and all he heard was the rattling of the wind of winter, wrenching at some loose shingle on the roof, and he knew that he was alone in the world, for he had put out a life.

He found a strange weight pulling down his right hand, and started when he saw the revolver. He replaced it in the holster automatically, and in so doing touched the barrel and found it warm.

Then fear came to Pierre, the first real fear of his life. He jerked his head high and looked about him. The room was utterly empty. He tiptoed to the door and found even the long bar deserted, littered with tall bottles and overturned glasses. The cold in his heart increased. A moment before he had been hand in hand with all the mirth in that place.

Now the men whose laughter he had repeated with smiles, the men against whose sleeves his elbow had touched, were further away from him than they had been when all the snow-covered miles from Morgantown to the school of Father Victor had laid between them. They were men who might lose themselves in any crowd, but he was set apart with a brand, even as Hurley and Diaz had been set apart that eventful evening.

He had killed a man. That fact blotted out the world. He drew his gun again and stole down the length of the bar. Once he stopped and poised the weapon before he realized that the white, fierce face that squinted at him was his own reflection in a mirror.

Outside the door the free wind caught at his face, and he blessed it in his heart, as if it had been the touch of the hand of a friend. Beyond the long, dark, silent street the moon rose and passed up through the safe, dark spaces of the sky.

He must move quickly now. The pursuit was not yet organized, but it would begin in a space of minutes. From the group of half a dozen horses which stood before the saloon he selected the best—a tall, raw-boned nag with an ugly head. Into the saddle he swung, wondering faintly that the theft of a horse mattered so little to him. His was the greatest sin. All other things mattered nothing.

Down the long street he galloped. The sharp echoes flew out at him from every unlighted house, but not a human being was in sight. So he swung out onto the long road which wound up through the

hills, and beside him rode a grim brotherhood, the invisible fellowship of Cain.

The moon rose higher, brighter, and a grotesque black shadow galloped over the snow beside him. He turned his head sharply to the other side and watched the sweep of white hills which reached back in range after range until they blended with the shadows of night.

The road faded to a bridle path, and this in turn he lost among the windings of the valley. He was lost from even the traces of men, and yet the fear of men pursued him. Fear, and yet with it there was a thrill of happiness, for every swinging stride of the tall, wild roan carried him deeper into freedom, the unutterable fierce freedom of the hunted.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VOICE IN THE STORM.

ALL life was tame compared with this sudden awakening of Pierre, for his whole being burst into flower, his whole nature opened. He had killed a man. For fear of it he raced the tall roan furiously through the night.

He had killed a man. For the joy of it his head was high, he shouted a song that went ringing across the blank, white hills. What place was there in Red Pierre for solemn qualms of conscience? Had he not met the first and last test triumphantly? The oldest instinct in creation was satisfied in him. Now he stood ready to say to all the world: Behold, a man!

Let it be remembered that his early years had been passed in a dull, dun silence, and time had slipped by him with softly padding, uneventful hours. Now, with the rope of restraint snapped, he rode at the world with hands, palm upward, asking for life, and that life which lies under the hills of the mountain-desert heard his question and sent a cold, sharp echo back to answer his lusty singing.

The first answer, as he plunged on, not knowing where, and not caring, was when the roan reeled suddenly and flung forward to the ground. Even that violent stop did not unseat Red Pierre. He jerked up on

the reins with a curse and drove in the spurs. Valiantly the horse reared his shoulders up, but when he strove to rise the right foreleg dangled helplessly. He had stepped in some hole and the bone was broken cleanly across.

The rider slipped from the saddle and stood facing the roan, which pricked its ears forward and struggled once more to regain its feet. The effort was hopeless, and Pierre took the broken leg and felt the rough edges of the splintered bone through the skin. The animal, as if it sensed that the man was trying to do it some good, nosed his shoulder and whinnied softly.

Pierre stepped back and drew his revolver. The bullet would do quickly what the cold would accomplish after lingering hours of torture, yet, facing those pricking ears and the brave trust of the eyes, he was blinded by a mist and could not aim. He had to place the muzzle of the gun against the roan's temple and pull the trigger. When he turned his back he was the only living thing within the white arms of the hills.

Yet, when the next hill was behind him, he had already forgotten the second life which he put out that night, for regret is the one sorrow which never dodges the footsteps of the hunted. Like all his brotherhood of Cain, Pierre le Rouge pressed forward across the mountain-desert with his face turned toward the brave to-morrow. In the evening of his life, if he should live to that time, he would walk and talk with God.

Now he had no mind save for the bright day coming.

He had been riding with the wind and had scarcely noticed its violence in his headlong course. Now he felt it whipping sharply at his back and increasing with each step. Overhead the sky was clear, pitilessly clear. It seemed to give vision for the wind and cold to seek him out, and the moon made his following shadow long and black across the snow.

The wind quickened rapidly to a gale that cut off the surface of the snow and whipped volleys of the small particles level with the surface. It cut the neck of Red Pierre, and the gusts struck his shoulders

with staggering force like separate blows, twisting him a little from side to side.

Coming from the direction of Morgantown, it seemed as if the vengeance for Diaz was following the slayer. Once he turned and laughed hard and short in the teeth of the wind, and shook his fist back at Morgantown and all the avenging powers of the law.

Yet he was glad to turn away from the face of the storm and stride on down-wind. Even traveling with the gale grew more and more impossible. The snowdrifts which the wind picked up and hurried across the hills pressed against Pierre's back like a great, invisible hand, bowing him as if beneath a burden. In the hollows the labor was not so great, but when he approached a summit the gale screamed in his ear and struck him savagely.

For all his optimism, for all his young, undrained strength, a doubt began to grow in the mind of Pierre le Rouge. At length, remembering how that weight of gold came in his pockets, he slipped his left hand into the bosom of his shirt and touched the icy metal of the cross. Almost at once he heard, or thought he heard, a faint, sweet sound of singing.

The heart of Red Pierre stopped. For he knew the visions which came to men perishing with cold; but his grew calmer again in a moment. This touch of cold was nothing compared with whole months of hard exposure which he had endured in the northland. It had not the edge. If it were not for the wind it was scarcely a threat to life. Moreover, the singing sounded no more. It had been hardly more than a phrase of music, and it must have been a deceptive murmur of the wind.

After all, a gale brought wilder deceptions than that. Some men had actually heard voices declaiming words in such a wind. He himself had heard them tell their stories. So he leaned forward again and gave his stanch heart to the task. Yet once more he stopped, for this time the singing came clearly, sweetly to him.

There was no doubt of it now. Of course it was wildly impossible, absurd; but beyond all question he heard the voice of a

woman, high and tender, come whistling down the wind. He could almost catch the words. For a little moment he lingered still. Then he turned and fought his way into the strong arms of the storm.

Every now and then he paused and crouched to the snow. Usually there was only the shriek of the wind in his ears, but a few times the singing came to him and urged him on. If he had allowed the idea of failure to enter his mind, he must have given up the struggle, but failure was a stranger to his thoughts.

He lowered his head against the storm. Sometimes it caught under him and nearly lifted him from his feet. But he clung against the slope of the hill, sometimes gripping hard with his hands. So he worked his way to the right, the sound of the singing coming more and more frequently and louder and louder. When he was almost upon the source of the music it ceased abruptly.

He waited a moment, but no sound came. He struggled forward a few more yards and pitched down exhausted, panting. Still he heard the singing no longer. With a falling heart he rose and resigned himself to wander on his original course with the wind, but as he started he placed his hand once more against the cross, and it was then that he saw her.

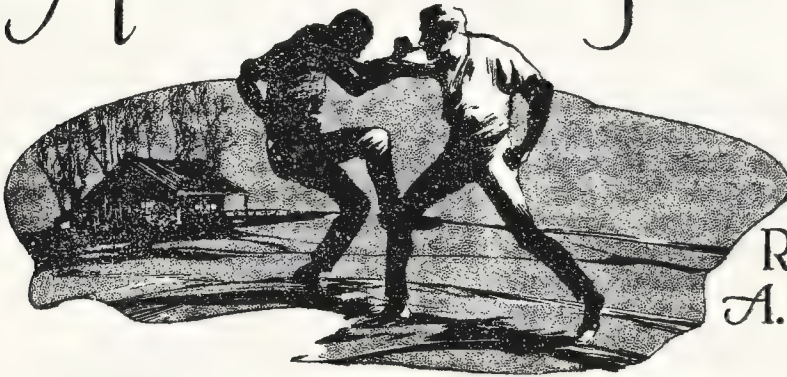
For he had simply gone past her, and the yelling of the storm had cut off the sound of her voice. Now he saw her lying, a spot of bright color on the snow. He read the story at a glance.

However, the woman happened to be wandering over the snow on such a night; as she passed this steep-sided hill the loosely piled snow had slid down and carried with it the dead trunk of a fallen tree.

Pierre came from behind and stood over her unnoticed. He saw that the oncoming tree, by a strange chance, had knocked down the girl and pinned her legs to the ground. His strength and the strength of a dozen men would not be sufficient to release her. This he saw at the first glance, and saw the bright gold of her hair against the snow. Then he dropped on his knees beside her.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Avalanche Tactics



by

Russell
A. Boggs

I.

OLD Sherwood Mitchell, president of what was known as the Northern System of railroads, looked quizzically at young, well set-up, clean-faced Dexter Mitchell, his son.

"But how about this five-hundred-dollar contract?" he asked.

Dexter shook his head.

"I'll turn it down," he answered; "I haven't signed it."

"Five hundred dollars is a lot of money for playing a game of football," observed his father. "Man, you must be a hardy piece to have the professionals after you for the coming fall!"

Dexter grinned. "I can stand some knocking about," he acknowledged.

"How many games does the contract call for?"

"Six."

"That would bring you three thousand, in all. A nice handful for such a young fellow," mused the older man. "And you're going to decline it?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because it's time to go to work—real work," replied Dexter.

Sherwood Mitchell nodded. There was a little twinkle in his eyes as he gazed affectionately at his big son—as if in some way what Dexter had just said confirmed a belief the father had held.

"That's right, Dex! Somehow the idea of your playing professional football didn't seem quite the thing. I've always figured on your good sense; I've felt that when you decided to turn your hand to business, to earning money, you'd come and tell me about it. I don't say by any means that there's anything wrong about the professional game; only I'm mighty pleased that you want to take up this other line." He sat drumming his fingers on his desk a moment.

"Well," he said finally, "what had you in mind; where had you calculated on starting in?"

"I don't know exactly," responded Dex. "I'd rather thought I'd leave that to you."

Old Sherwood Mitchell was listening attentively.

"Something like assistant trainmaster or chief clerk somewhere, I suppose?"

"Yes," admitted his son. "Most anything like that. I've known right along that I'd have to start in at the bottom some place and work up."

There was considerable of a silence before the elder Mitchell spoke again. His drumming on the desk had ceased. When he did speak at last it was, in a way, reluctantly.

"I'm sorry, Dex," he said, "but I'm afraid that, after all, you sort of have the wrong idea."

"The wrong idea!" echoed the son. He plainly was puzzled.

"Yes," affirmed the father; "the wrong idea. You see, son, an assistant trainmaster's position is not precisely the bottom—nor is the position of, say, chief clerk to a division superintendent. Probably men in either position would be quite frankly surprised if you were to suggest such a classification to them—quite as surprised as you would be if you were to know the many qualifications necessary to fill their places."

"I don't—" began Dexter, interrupting.

"Wait," said his father. "I'm going to be perfectly candid with you. According to my outline of the thing you'll be fortunate to get to either place inside of a couple of years. You're young, and you can well afford to go a bit slow for a time in order to learn this railroading thoroughly. And that's what I want you to do: learn it from A to Z, from cap to toe."

"Of course—" tried Dexter again, as his father paused for a minute.

"Of course," broke in the elder quickly, "you might start in a position you were not capable of filling—and get away with it, too, due to diplomatic covering up and ignoring of your mistakes, all on account of the prestige given you by your father's office. But that's not the way I'm going to have you do; nor, for that matter, do I believe you'd want it that way—not after you reflect a bit."

"N-no," mused Dexter. "Certainly not."

"Good!" said Mitchell, Sr. "Then I'll give you my outline. You'll start in at the bottom—the real bottom. Then, as you acquire experience and wisdom you'll move up—not too fast, but slowly enough to pick up full knowledge of the workings of each department. You'll have a full-sized program on your hands, and the higher you climb probably the less conceited you'll become. But, anyway, following this plan, when you do get to the top you'll know the whys and wherefores of things—or should. No man then should be able to put anything over on you easily; your knowledge should be intimate, your judgment ripened and sure. Does such a plan appeal to you?"

Dexter was silent a moment.

"I'll follow it," he finally said. "It doubtless is the best way."

"But it's a bit disappointing—about the start?" pressed his father.

"Y-yes," answered Dexter, "I'll confess it is. But I'm game to try it."

"I know you've got the sand, Dex!" declared the other. "And I've been counting on you." Mitchell, Sr., straightened up in his chair. "And now about the start. It will be without pomp of any kind; you'll merely take your place like any other beginner. Moreover, if I were you I'd not put on any side about your father's position or about your prospects and all that. Understand?"

"I do," said Dex.

"I thought you would, but I'm just mentioning it anyway. Mitchell is by no means an uncommon name"—old Sherwood smiled slightly—"and it might be a good plan to sort of keep from emphasizing your status with me. Of course if you are questioned I wouldn't deny it, but if you can sort of keep the fact in the background I believe you'll profit. Employees at the best are wary of officials—not always without good cause, I'm sorry to say—and do not willingly lay bare their intimate thoughts and feelings. But if you can be one of them, without in any way being a spotter, you'll likely learn things and conditions that, when you get the power, you can remedy for them. This business will stand a lot of that sort of thing."

"I see," said the son.

"All right. The next thing, then, is the place for you to start. I've got one picked, if it suits you."

"Where?"

"In Agent Haskell's office, out at Bell City, on the S. R. and O. There you'll learn the mysteries of the waybill, the expense bill, and station accounts in general. You can pick away at the telegraph end, too. What do you say; will you go?"

"I'm for it!" said Dexter.

II.

It was in July that Dexter Mitchell went to work at Bell City station with Agent Sam Haskell; and it was near the end of the following January that Haskell suddenly broached the subject of a change to Dex. The agent had gone in to division

headquarters on the matter of a disputed claim, and it was the evening of the same day when he returned. After the train had gone he approached Dex in the office.

"I saw Superintendent Ruff to-day," began Haskell, without preface. "He said he's got an agency open for a good man. I told him I believed I had that sort of a fellow."

"Meaning Gates?" said Dex.

"No, not Gates. Gates has been a bill clerk for ten years, and I expect he'll not be anything else in the next ten. I had another fellow in mind: you."

"Get out!" exclaimed Mitchell.

"Sure, you. You've been here about seven months, and you've got a pretty good working knowledge of this agency business. I'll not say you've learned it all; I've been at the job for about twenty-five years myself and I wouldn't claim that much for my own self—and no comparisons drawn, you understand. But you've got enough for this place Ruff has in mind. You can handle inbound and outbound freight; you can sell tickets; and you've got a fair running start at the telegraph game. You'll get by."

"Oh, I'll take a crack at it, if you say I'm fit," said Dex.

"That's the idea!" proclaimed Sam. "Besides, the superintendent is looking for what he calls an active young man. Judging by the way you handled that fresh brakeman who dropped the keg of nails on your toe the other day, I know you'd pass for active." Sam's eyes dwelt admiringly on his tall, big-framed clerk.

The clerk smiled. "Where is this agency?"

"Up at Lister's Corners—way up on the Gray River branch. Where the country's rough and the people are rougher—some of 'em. That's why the boss wants an active man."

"Do the natives bean you from behind a stump, or do they simply shoot on sight?" asked Dexter, grinning.

"Oh, they're not quite that bad," replied Sam. "Fact is, some of them are pretty decent. But there's a bunch of the younger element who don't seem to know what to do with themselves when they're

holed up there in the winter. So they gather round the big stove in Cal Lister's store and plot mischief—and the bright and shining object of about ninety per cent of their plotting is the station agent."

"Why do they pick on him especially?"

"Lord knows just why! But you know the old saw that it's always open season on agents. Then, too, experiments usually work better on an outsider—and it's safer, besides."

"The thing started, I believe, when in the course of a friendly snowball combat one day the agent binged the chief village cut-up on the nose with a flaky pellet. That had a bad effect on the cut-up's temper; so a little later he and a bunch of particular friends sneaked down to the depot, nailed shut the doors of the agent's merchandise car, and, when the agent came out and tried to pry it open, pelted him half to death with water-soaked snowballs and chunks of ice. He left."

"And then what?" asked Dexter.

"Then came another agent, Jepman. They locked him out of the station one cold day—kept him out from noon until evening. Just happened there wasn't any trains came along. Jepman departed that night. And Cortland. The freight-room there is in the same building as the office—right next to it. Well, the gang gathered in there one day when the door happened to be open and began a rough-house. They like to raised the roof with their racket. Cortland asked 'em to stop; he was trying to copy a train order and couldn't hear the sounder. They grabbed him and just naturally took him pretty near apart—shoes off, clothes in rags, hat gone—everything. As soon as he could gather together enough to cover him, Cortland beat it, fast."

"So that's the way it's been going. The last regular agent was Farley. He got just plain beat up by this village cut-up. If there was any particular reason for Farley's treatment, I haven't heard it. Anyway you can bet he didn't stay; he wasn't very big in the first place."

"Oh, ho!" said Dex. "I'm beginning to see. The unfortunate agent must be active in order to avoid their deviltry, eh?"

"He certainly must!" affirmed Sam.

"But avoiding is not exactly what the old man wants just now. He's getting a bit peeved over having so many of his agents set upon up there—with the result that none of them will stick. In fact, to put it plain, he's looking for a fellow who'll stand up to the music; one who'll wade right in when the town boys start anything—and finish it for 'em!"

"Say, this is beginning to sound real interesting," said Mitchell. "Who's there now?"

"Relief Agent Haines—and scared most to death. The old man told me he gets a message from Haines every day, praying to be relieved."

"And who's this village hero, this ring-leader of the gang; do you know?"

"Yes; there seems to be one Bode Kehoe that's the chief spirit among them. A young fellow with a little money—timber interests or something. He's a chap who's called strong in a country of strong men, and devilish as they make 'em."

"Well, I'll see him when I get there; we'll meet, doubtless."

"Then you'll go?"

"Go? Bet your life! When do I start?"

"I told the superintendent that if you were willing to try it I'd send you in to see him to-morrow morning. I hate to lose you; but it's your chance, and if you can put it over—put a little civilization into the hearts of those young savages up at the Corners—why, you'll sure make a hit with the old man. And he's the kind that doesn't forget."

"Wire him I'm a coming!" said the man whose name on the gridiron for four years had been "Avalanche."

III.

It was toward noon of the following day when Superintendent Ruff and Dexter Mitchell concluded their conference.

"There is no hotel at the corners," Ruff explained, after they had gone pretty well over things, "and no regular boarding place. There was a hotel, but it burned down about a year ago. There's a little room above the depot office that's been finished off, though, and the agents have

been sleeping there; you'll find a bed in it, and a few other things you'll need. But for meals you'll have to go to Cal Lister's. His house and store is all one building, a couple of hundred yards from the station. His wife is dead, but he has a daughter who keeps house for him; they seem to be the only ones around who are willing to take our boys in and give them a bite to eat. You'll find Lister a pretty good sort—neutral in all the agent's troubles."

"I see," remarked Mitchell.

"And about the daughter," pursued Ruff, smiling slightly. "They say she's rather unusual—something of a beauty and all that. Better keep away from her. That was where one of our agents, Farley, made his mistake. This Bode Kehoe seems gone on her, and he resented Farley's attentions. The result was that he hammered Farley to a pulp."

"I'm obliged," smiled Avalanche.

"Just a bit of friendly warning," said the superintendent. He paused a moment, then: "I guess that's about all. You can catch the train to-morrow morning; that'll get you to the Corners in the evening. We'll wire Relief Agent Haines you're coming."

Dexter rose and picked up his hat.

"All right," he said. "Thank you."

"I know you'll do your best," and Ruff rose also. "Of course I don't expect you to do anything miraculous; but if you can get Kehoe and his bunch settled you'll sure be doing something." He extended his hand.

"I'll make no promises," responded Dexter as they shook. "But I will say this: just watch my reports."

IV.

IN midwinter the two highways that intersect at Lister's Corners become practically closed to traffic, in so far as any very extensive traffic to or from the surrounding country is concerned. When the big snow comes, and the wind sweeps over the big hills and through the valleys, the highways disappear, blocked and covered with drifts house-high, drifts that only the spring thaws will obliterate.

Consequently the folks of the Corners,

in large degree, hole up for the season. True, there is the railroad with its daily passenger train in either direction. But as the next town north is twelve miles distant, and as the next one south is fifteen, and as neither possesses more cosmopolitan attractions than Lister's Corners itself does, the Corners people see no great reason for much intercourse with them.

Moreover, the nearest sizable town lies fifty miles to the south, and that, to the Corners, seemed too great a distance to travel for any very extensive casual visiting. So, save for a few exceptions, in their own village the Corners folks remained during the cold months, after the first big snow.

The Corners proper boasts of not over a score of houses, all told. On the corner of the two crossroads nearest the depot stands Lister's store, the social center of the community. But though the Corners itself has so few dwellings, within a mile radius from the store a goodly number of habitations are stuck in nooks and corners of the hills; and when at night a fair proportion of the men folks had gathered round the big stove in Lister's, the store was well filled.

Thirty, forty, was not an infrequent number; and good-natured, tolerant Cal Lister, round-faced and heavy-set, enjoyed the nightly assembly as much as any of them. By common consent, or understanding, the old curved-back, stiff-legged chair that stood beneath the big oil lamp was reserved exclusively for him; and rarely did any other venture to use it.

Near the rear of the store a door opened into a small, square hallway. From the hallway another door opened directly into the dwelling part of Lister's building—into his kitchen, to be exact. And while Cal Lister reigned supreme in the store, in this other part of the building his daughter, Jessie, held the scepter.

Truth to tell, the first part of this statement might well be amended, for if occasion required, Jessie Lester extended the boundaries of her domain and held sway over both places; but it was seldom that she exercised her authority in her father's own peculiar bailiwick.

It was shortly after six o'clock P.M. on the second day following Dexter Mitchell's arrival that the new agent at Lister's Corners got "Good night" from the despatcher and proceeded to set things in order for the night. As he pulled the block levers to the clear position and propped them, he found himself pleasantly a tingle with anticipation of supper at Lister's—and seeing Jessie.

He had been surprised. Previous to his arrival conjecture over Lister's daughter had occupied but a small portion of Mitchell's time. In the odd moments he had thus casually spent he had supposed that he would find her the usual type of backwoods belle: good looking, probably, but rather shallow-brained, high pitched of voice, and inclined to be somewhat kittenish in a boisterous sort of way. Yes, he'd certainly been surprised.

Without troubling to go up to the little bedroom above the office and light the lamp there, he locked the lower doors of the station, leaving the light in the office turned low against his return. He tramped quickly up the road that led to Lister's. The evening was clear and cold, the snow crunching crisply under his feet; to the east the moon, at the full, just tipped the wooded hills.

Upon reaching Lister's he did not enter through the store, but went around to a door at the rear. A light glowed warmly in the kitchen window as he approached. He turned the knob and entered.

"Good evening!" he said.

The girl who stood at the stove, her back to him, was tall, and might have been called statuesque had it not been for the swift, lithe grace of her movements. She was lifting a pan as Dexter entered, and it was a half second before she turned to face him, returning his greeting.

The coil of hair that she had twisted cunningly about her head was heavy and black, lustrous as a blackbird's wing. Her eyes matched her hair; her cheeks were wonderfully smooth, curved in gently firm lines. Over her simple, dark gown she wore a white apron, triangle shaped at the bottom, and held by straps that fitted over her splendid shoulders.

Involuntarily Dex caught his breath sharply, struck by her appearance as he had been on the day of his arrival. "Unusual," Superintendent Ruff had said of her. He had been right. But she was unusual to a degree that the superintendent had not known, or mentioned. No ordinary backwoods belle, this girl.

"And how did to-day go?" she asked. She smiled slightly, in a friendly sort of way.

Her smooth, well-modulated voice and her excellent poise impressed him as they had the first day.

"Fine!" he returned. "Not a bit of trouble—thanks."

He removed his short reefer coat and hung it and his cap on a small rack fastened to the wall near the door. Lister's daughter turned and once again shifted utensils skilfully on the stove.

"Father's had his supper," she remarked. "He was expecting a man in about six o'clock—a man who wants to talk about a piece of timber back in the country. So he said he'd eat first and not wait."

"I hope you've not," Dex ventured, smiling.

"You might look," she replied, with a glance over her shoulder toward the open door of the dining-room.

He walked to the door and perceived that the table was neatly set for two; he warmed at the prospect of their dining alone.

"By George!" he exclaimed. There was no mistaking the pleasure in his voice.

She brought the things from the stove and placed them on the table—a platter of deliciously browned steak, a steaming dish of potatoes, another of canned corn. They sat down.

"Do you know," he said, as he sat admiring the skill and ease with which she served him, "I can't help but think this unending string of agents you take care of must be an awful nuisance."

"Just how?" she asked.

"Why, so many different types, all with their own peculiar whims and oddities."

She laughed.

"Well, they're not! Some one has to

take them in, poor fellows, and no one else but father and I seem to want to take the—the responsibility."

"It's good of you," he insisted.

"Perhaps. Anyway, it helps break the monotony a bit for us—for me, at least."

He was silent a second.

"I suppose it does get monotonous."

"Yes—but not in the way I think you mean. I love this country—these hills and valleys and big trees. Anything can grow monotonous. Life in a mansion in the world's most charming city could, I imagine. To one there a visitor from the big woods might be a refreshing incident—if you get what I mean."

He nodded soberly, a little astonished at her keenness.

"I do. And I believe you're quite right." He thoughtfully toyed with a spoon. "I'm thinking, though, that in me you've drawn what will prove to be a disappointing incident." It was a trifle bald, this latter observation; but he had a most curious desire to see what his angling would develop. He was not disappointed.

"That may be," she admitted calmly. She paused. "But I have hopes."

He chuckled and regarded her across the table. Her eyes met his; their gaze held an instant, and then, for no apparent reason other than their youthful high spirits, they both broke into merry laughter.

"I hope you'll not think me rude, or snobbish," he said when their merriment had subsided, "but I know you've been—that you haven't spent all your days up here—in the woods, as you say."

"No," she returned, "I haven't. I went East to school for several years; and now occasionally I go out for a few weeks."

"I was sure of it," he declared. "I know you'll understand when I say there are things one doesn't pick up in—in this sort of country."

"I understand perfectly," she said simply. "However much one may love it up here, the life has its limitations; I appreciate that."

In the kitchen the door that led to the store suddenly banged open and some one entered there. Dexter could not see out, but he imagined that it must be Lister; the

voice that spoke, however, was to the agent unknown.

"Jessie!"

She had half risen. But at the call she calmly sat down again.

"Yes?" she answered.

There was a quick step, and a man apparently but slightly over Dexter's age appeared in the doorway—a tall, powerfully built young man, with a rather handsome face and snappy dark eyes, but with somewhat thin and straight, tight lips. He paused as he beheld the two at the table; an unpleasant light crept into his eyes as he regarded the agent.

"Come in!" invited Lister's daughter.

"No thanks," he returned bruskiy. "I came in to see your father—on business. Thought I'd look in here and say hello."

"That was right," she replied evenly. She turned and looked at Dexter. "Mr. Mitchell, this is Mr. Kehoe."

Dex rose and bowed slightly. This, then, he reflected rapidly, was the man whom Lister was expecting to see about six. Bode Kehoe, he knew, had been absent from the Corners since the day of his arrival—back in the country somewhere, he'd heard. Dexter eyed the man with interest. "I'm pleased," he murmured.

Kehoe bobbed his head.

"Glad to know you," he declared, his own eyes dwelling in an appraising sort of manner on Dex's tall figure.

"Mr. Mitchell is the new agent at the Corners," explained Jessie.

There was, the new agent believed, a suppressed sort of twinkle in her eyes as she said it.

"I heard there was another one here," said Kehoe, his voice, if anything, more bruski than before. His brow wrinkled slightly.

Now Dex, on his way up to the Corners, had turned over in his mind ways and means of action when he arrived; and the conclusion he had reached was simply this: not to attempt to avoid trouble, to act quick and trust to luck.

So now he said: "I have understood, Mr. Kehoe, that you have been taking quite an unusual sort of interest in the Corners' agents."

"Yes," responded Kehoe, clearly a little surprised despite the flash of savage amusement that flitted over his face.

"I'll likely have some dealings with you then," went on Dex.

The swift, savage grin once more crossed Kehoe's face.

"I wouldn't be surprised," he answered.

But at this point Lister's daughter apparently decided that the imminent hostility should have no further opportunity to flare forth—not just then, at least.

"Won't you have a bite with us?" she broke in, looking at Kehoe.

"No—thanks," he replied. "I've eaten." There was a jealous flicker in his eyes as he stepped back from the doorway. "I'll be in again," he finished, and turning quickly he went back into the store.

Dex seated himself once more and coolly resumed his meal.

"A big man," he observed.

"If you mean physically, yes," said Jessie. "Wonderfully strong."

Here, reflected Dex, was an opportunity to press a point. But he refrained. Certainly, he ruminated, there had been nothing in the attitude of Lister's daughter to betoken any particular sentiment for Kehoe. He was pleased, mightily.

They finished their meal. Dex offered his services as assistant dishwasher. They were declined, politely but firmly. So he took his cap from the rack and moved to the door that opened toward the store.

"I think I'll step over into the store a minute and see how things are," he remarked.

She turned at once and faced him. No evening since his arrival had the agent done that. A quick look of alarm came into her face.

"Don't!"

He paused, his hand on the knob, in his eyes the interrogation that his lips did not utter. She hesitated the merest instant.

"I think you know why," she said then, as if he really had put the question aloud. "There may be trouble if you go in there where all the men are gathered." She cast a quick glance at a clock on the mantel; its hands stood at a few minutes past seven. "They'll be in by this time; and it will be

especially dangerous to-night when Bode— "No," she said, with not the faintest trace of self-consciousness or embarrassment. "No; nothing."

"I'm sorry," he responded, "but I can't allow that to stop me. This ragging of the Corners' agents has been going on long enough."

She seemed to comprehend the things he left unsaid.

"Then you're going in there deliberately—with the deliberate intention of showing them—him—that you cannot be bluffed?"

He inclined his head slightly.

"Something like that," he admitted.

She was regarding him steadily with her big, dark eyes. A thrill went through him as he considered her beauty, her magnificent figure.

"But there are so many of them, if anything should start!" she persisted. "None of the other agents ever went into the store at night."

He shook his head gently.

"Neither numbers nor precedents must stop me," he returned. "I must go in, if only to show them that. If anything should develop I'll try to come through. But I'll not wait around, or try to sidestep anything they may hatch up for me; I've promised myself that."

She crossed the room quickly and held out her hand; her eyes were shining.

"If you must go, shake first!" she said. "I know just how you feel!"

Eagerly he clasped her warm, strong fingers, delighted with the straightforward unexpectedness of her move.

"You're wishing me luck!" he exclaimed, looking steadily into her glowing eyes. The top of her head, he noted, came well above the level of his shoulders. Truly a magnificent woman! A magnificent couple, an observer might have said.

"I am," she replied. "The best of luck!"

"Even with Bode?" For the life of him he could not keep the question back.

Her answer was instant.

"Even with him," she said; and then added, somewhat surprisingly: "why not?"

"Oh—" he stumbled, in confusion. "I thought—I understood—"

Quite patently she divined his predicament.

He was rather astounded at her candor. But on the other hand there was something wonderfully appealing about her utter directness, something that seemed to grip him and make his blood dance through his veins. Any reluctance he may have felt regarding Kehoe fled; he was elated.

"You've doubled my strength!" he told her, then he turned quickly, opened the door and went out into the little hallway that opened into the store.

V.

By the sudden silence that fell on the assembly as he entered the store, Dexter judged that the subject of the interrupted discussion more than likely had been himself. On counters, boxes, barrels, and a few odd chairs, the men were ranged—a score and a half at least.

On his chair under the lamp Cal Lister sat, blinking and puffing placidly at his pipe. He, as well as the others, quite obviously was surprised at the agent's entrance. After a short, embarrassed pause, Cal spoke, in an effort to ease the atmosphere.

"Boys," he remarked affably, "I guess you all know the new agent."

A murmur of assent ran through the gathering. Dex moved unobtrusively, yet not timidly, to one side of the irregular circle about the stove. He leaned back at ease against a corner of the counter.

"Yes," said a voice near the front door. "We know him."

Mitchell looked and perceived that it was Kehoe who spoke. The latter stood with his coat buttoned up, his fur cap pulled down, as if about to leave.

"Ah, yes," said Dex evenly, "Mr. Kehoe. The man who beat up Agent Farley—one whom I've heard was ten years your senior and about half your weight and size. A brave deed, Mr. Kehoe."

Something like a gasp sounded in the store. All eyes were turned to Dexter, then to Kehoe, tensely.

In the lamp light Kehoe's face flushed furiously. He strode forward two steps.

"How's that?" he cried, his head thrust forward aggressively.

"I was trying to say," replied the undisturbed Dex, "that your assault on Agent Farley was contemptible. Is that word clear enough?"

With a kind of snarl Bode leaped at Mitchell. The agent swerved, swiftly and smoothly, dodging to one side as he had dodged many a vicious tackler on the gridiron. But as Dex whirled about and started to straighten up, a chair swung through the air and one of its stout legs crashed upon his head. Without a sound the agent dropped to the floor, stunned.

Immediately Kehoe flung himself upon the fallen man, a hoarse rumbling coming from his lips. With one hand he clutched Dex's throat; his other hand he raised in air to strike, fingers clenched.

"You'll not touch him," said a quiet voice behind the raging, exultant Kehoe. Bode knew that voice. Fist still in mid-air, he twisted his head about, astonished.

As Kehoe had leaped at Mitchell the door at the rear of the store had opened noiselessly, and Lister's daughter had stepped in, unnoticed by the crowd, who had eyes and ears but for the action before them. As Kehoe had leaped she had seen Mitchell dodge, and had seen, then, one of Bode's followers snatch up the chair behind the agent's back and strike Dexter over the head wickedly.

"Get up!" commanded Lister's daughter as the amazed Kehoe still remained motionless. Her voice, while unhurried, was filled with something that snapped and stung.

"You'd strike a man when he's down!" she continued, each word like the sting of a rawhide quirt. "A man who was put down not by yourself even, but by one of your helpful friends."

Her eyes, cold as bits of ice, she lifted from Kehoe and fastened upon a thin-faced, wavering-eyed creature, now lurking in the rear of the circle of men. "You, Hoxie—I saw you do it! You're a sneak!" She pointed to the door at the front of the store: "Get out!"

A dead silence had fallen over the gathering. Cal Lister stood close behind his

daughter. Without delay and without a word Hoxie slunk out the door.

Kehoe, by this time, had got to his feet, sullen and silent. On the floor the agent stirred slightly; his eyelids quivered with returning consciousness. The girl looked at Kehoe again.

"You'd better go, too!" she said, her voice still as low-pitched as when she first spoke.

Kehoe's countenance flamed hotly. He seemed to squirm. There was an air of finality to her words that was unmistakable.

"I didn't—" he began desperately.

"You did!" she interrupted coldly. She looked at the door. "I'm waiting."

Kehoe turned, stalked to the door, and passed out. One by one the others of the crowd quickly followed, silently, uneasily, sensing in some way that it would not be well to tarry.

As the last man made his exit, Mitchell's eyes opened, bewilderedly. Jessie stooped, then spoke to her father.

"Get me some water, please. He'll be all right in a few minutes, I think."

VI.

"But why did you do it?" asked the Corners' new agent.

Seated in a big chair in Lister's living-room, he regarded Lister's daughter where she sat in a low rocker by the side of the blazing fireplace. It was not half an hour after Dexter had regained consciousness. Lister himself was not in the room. Somewhere out in the store he was pottering about, closing up.

"I was afraid," she replied frankly. "I know how reckless the men around here—some of them—are. So I followed, shortly after you went out."

"And you saw this Hoxie hit me with the chair?"

She nodded assent. "Yes. I'll say, though, his doing that was more than I expected. I hadn't thought any of them would be so—so treacherous."

He was silent for a little time, gazing into the fireplace at the glowing logs. Save for a slightly sore spot on top of his head he felt as good as ever.

A sense of shame at his own headlong innocence crept over him. He had been going to do so much; and here he had been saved from a bad pummeling by Jessie—by a girl!

What a fool she must think him. Suppressed rage slowly possessed him—rage at his own undoing. The mere fact that his undoing had been brought about in an underhanded manner made no difference; he should have been watching for that very thing.

A fine start he had made! With what contempt, what sly amusement would the Corners' people regard the first exhibition of his prowess! He must redeem himself, he reflected savagely. He must show them—show Kehoe, show the Corners he was no weakling, no fool; yes, show Jessie, too! He rose abruptly to his feet.

"I must be going," he said quickly. "Thank you for—for what you've done."

She rose also, uneasy at the fierce light in his eyes.

"Don't go to the depot to-night," she pressed. "We'll put you up. It will be better."

"You think I may run into trouble again?"

"Yes. Kehoe will be furious; he'll be liable to try most anything."

"Furious because you wouldn't let him touch me?"

"Y—yes—partly. After seeing how Hoxie and he acted to-night, I'll admit, frankly, that I'm afraid. This sort of thing has been carried too far; it should have been stopped before."

He shook his head.

"No," he said, "I can't stay. I must go down. I've been—you've done enough."

By the deep color that ebbed into his face she understood—understood that he meant she had protected him enough—that he could not longer shield himself behind her. She remained silent, respecting his spirit; but clearly she was troubled.

"Good night!" he said, and stepped toward the door. "I'll see you in the morning." He put an air of gaiety into the last words and twisted the latch.

She had moved half-way across the floor.

Standing there she looked at him gravely, her eyes cloudy.

"Yes," she said, contriving a smile, "of course. Good night!"

The night was wonderfully quiet as Dex strode toward the station. From the clean sky the full moon shown dazzlingly on the snow, making the night almost as light as the day had been. He passed no dwellings, Lister's place being the nearest to the depot.

Still burning with mortification over his night's showing, Dex rounded the back of the station—which Lister's faced—and swung onto the platform in front. From the shadows of a protected corner two figures popped out into the moonlight and confronted him aggressively—Kehoe and Hoxie!

"Now, then, you dashed agent!" cried Kehoe. "I'm going to finish what I started! There's no one here to interfere—nobody to beg you off!"

"And Hoxie to help again!" taunted Dex. He had not been greatly surprised. His pulses pumped furiously, exultingly. Here was his chance again!

"No!" roared Bode. "He'll not help!"

"Unless needed," grinned Dex. He drew back a step, peeled off his coat in a single quick movement, and dropped it to the platform. His temples were pounding with the old familiar throbbing that he used to feel just before the kickoff in the old football days.

"Are you afraid?" jeered Kehoe.

"No, you conceited pup!" answered Dex, and stepped forward.

Like a bull elephant on the charge Kehoe jumped in.

"Anything goes!" he gritted, and smashed out with his fists.

The strength of the man was astonishing. His mighty fists beat upon Dexter's guard like the blows of sledges. The agent weaved to one side to avoid a ponderous blow, straightened, and with his elbow ward off another. This latter threw Bode slightly off his balance, his guard dropped. Swinging from the hip, Dex drove home a body blow, just above the heart.

Kehoe staggered back a step; a grunt

of pain came from him. Enraged, he suddenly dropped both hands, crouched and leaped, endeavoring to grapple with the agent. But at this sort of game Avalanche Mitchell was right at home. Stooping swiftly he sent his shoulder squarely into the pit of the oncoming Bode's stomach, wrapped his arms about Kehoe's knees and heaved. It was a savage tackle; Kehoe hit the platform with a crash.

"Better call on Hoxie!" prodded Dex, grinning again as he watched Bode scramble to his feet.

"Go to hell!" panted Bode, and charged in again.

Once more the sledgelike blows beat upon the agent's guard. Parrying, shifting and dodging, he managed to avoid most of them. But a few got through, most of them robbed of their greatest sting, but still powerful nevertheless.

A huge fist grazed Dexter's chin. Another landed over his left eye; he felt a trickle of blood. He decided the thing must end—he could not afford to take any more chances; a lucky blow might put him out.

"Watch out for yourself!" flashed Dex, and for the first time assumed the offensive seriously.

Now Kehoe undoubtedly had strength, but after all that was about all his game amounted to—just the brute force of it. With lightninglike precision Dex's knuckles played upon him, blindingly, unceasingly, on face and body.

Panting and gasping, Kehoe yielded a step. Mitchell's fist found a clean target again, and Bode gave another step. With wary eyes Dex watched the sly Hoxie, hovering just behind Kehoe. As Dex drove Bode back he saw the apprehensive Hoxie suddenly dodge in an attempt to get in back of him.

"I thought so, Kehoe!" grunted the agent. "Here comes your help—and something else!" He feinted, threw Bode off, and struck powerfully. There was a crack as the fist found Bode's chin. Kehoe dropped hard.

Dexter wasted no more time on this opponent; Bode was down and Bode was out.

"You're next, Hoxie!" cried Dex, whirl-

ing on Kehoe's amazed and now frightened companion. "Oh, boy, but I owe you one!"

VII.

IMMEDIATELY after Dexter had left the house, Jessie Lister ran up the stairs to her room. The room was dark, and without striking a light she went quickly to the window that faced the rear of the station. From where she stood she knew that she could see the gleam of the lamp in the upstairs room of the depot when Dexter lit it—if he did. If it were lit she would know that he had at least reached there without molestation. But if she should not catch the gleam—

As Dexter walked down the unshaded, brightly moonlit road, Jessie could see him. She saw him reach the station, saw the black blur of his figure disappear around the corner. Impatiently she waited for the gleam in the upper window.

Several long minutes she stood there; no sign. Fear gripped her heart; she twisted the curtains with clutching fingers. Another minute she waited—then spun about and ran back down the stairs. Her father was not in sight—doubtless he still was in the store. Without a second's hesitation she slipped into her coat, pulled a round woolen bonnet on her head and ran out the door. For the second time that night she followed Dexter Mitchell.

On flying feet she came to the depot. A cry of pain reached her ears. Heartsick, she flew around the corner—and paused, smothering the word that trembled on her lips.

Twenty feet from her two men struggled. As she stopped, one of the men seemed to spring from the platform, backwards. He rose in the air—fell; and as he fell she noted that he dropped beside another figure that already rested upon the snow. The moon shone on the quiet two—Kehoe and Hoxie. She looked at the man who stood erect, his back to her.

"Dexter!" she called, and ran to him.

He whirled about, incredulous.

"Again!" he cried, astounded.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "What happened? What have you done?"

He smiled and glanced at the fallen two on the platform.

"I've regained my self-respect, for one thing," he answered. He reached out to her, confident of the light in her eyes. "And with it I think I've found something else—a precious something! What do you say?"

And, sure enough, she presently agreed.

VIII.

OLD Sherwood Mitchell, alone in his office, smiled with satisfaction as he read the letter in his hand.

"So I've put over my first trick, dad," ran the letter toward the end. "Things promise to be settled for good now, here at Lister's Corners. I heard to-day that Kehoe—the fellow who kept things boiling all the time—is leaving; selling out his lumber interests and going to some other part of the country. For what might be called an amateur agent, it seems I haven't done so bad. Superintendent Ruff is pleased as *Punch*."

Mitchell, Sr., raised his eyes from the letter a moment, chuckling.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed. "Good boy, Dex!" He resumed his reading.

"And by the way, dad, this girl up here—Miss Lister; she helped me out more

than a little, as I've written. I wish you knew her."

The elder Mitchell suddenly straightened up in his chair.

"Humph!" he said, and read the last paragraph again. Then he scowled, ever so slightly. In some manner that "and by the way" and the "I wish you knew her," struck him suspiciously.

"The young rascal!" he mumbled. "I knew he had the right stuff in him—but somehow—somehow I wasn't counting exactly on anything like this. Not so soon, anyway."

He put the letter upon the desk, then settled heavily in his chair, chin propped on palm. For some minutes he sat immovable, thinking soberly. But finally the lines of his face eased slightly and something of a twinkle crept into his wise old eyes.

"I don't know," he muttered—"I don't know but what it might have been better for him to have stuck to the football business—safer, anyhow."

But old Sherwood was smiling again by the time he had finished this observation. He reached for a telegraph pad that lay on his desk and wrote:

DENTER MITCHELL, Agent,
Lister's Corners.
Congratulations—all around.

DAD.

THE YOU-AND-I-RONY OF FATE

THEY met, and eye and voice confessed
(As any one could plainly see)

A most unusual interest,
A sort of I-and-you-sury.

Far from the crowd, they spent the days
In beautiful self-dedication,
And sought the silent, lonely ways
In dreamy you-and-I-solation.

And each the other's praises sung,
Their soul-light bent as by a prism;
Through their engagement days they clung
To this high she-and-he-roism.

'Twas many moons ago: to-day
Their lives are full of storm and rain;
A tempest, or, as I may say,
A sort of him-and-her-ricane.

James W. Owen.



A Letter of Discredit

by Garret Smith

Author of "After a Million Years," "On the Brink of 2000," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNUSUAL REQUEST.

ARASPING "Come in!" echoed Bradwell's knock. The young ex-convict thrust open the dingy law-office door and faced the man whose testimony had cost him a year in State prison.

As the grizzled figure in the chair swung his big spectacles into line with the desperate determination in his stalwart young visitor's expression and bearing, he sprang to his feet in alarm.

"Stand back!" he commanded. "Not another step. So, Bradwell, you've come for your revenge, I suppose. You poor, young fool! You want to add felonious assault to your accomplishments. I heard of the threat you made in Merton's bar last night. You can't get out of here without being caught."

Mingled shame and protest crimsoned the visitor's prison-pallid face. Nevertheless, a faint gleam of whimsical contempt sparkled in the troubled blue eyes. Unconsciously he braced his broad shoulders and added an inch to his lithe six-foot frame. The old man's fright gave him just the needed moral advantage, yet when he spoke it was with respectful humility.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Warren. I'm

not after revenge. I was drunk last night and don't know what I said. That's over for good. I'm not blaming any one but myself. I'm going away at once, and quietly. I'm going to try to start over again somewhere. I want a fair show, and I want a little help from you."

The lawyer flashed instantly from fear to contemptuous indignation.

"Want me to agree to keep quiet about your performance hereafter, so you can settle in some innocent burg an' skin 'em alive! Well, I won't. If I get word of you anywhere in the country I'll write 'em and tell 'em to look out for you."

"Now you're megaphoning," Bradwell retorted. "You've hit on just what I want. I'm going to ask you to write that letter now. Just write the worst you can truthfully say about me; a sort of letter of discredit. I want it to take with me."

The lawyer was staring at him in suspicious amazement.

"You say you're not drunk to-day?" he asked. "What sort of fool joke is this?"

"No, I'm not joking," the other hastened on. "I'm perfectly sane and sober, and deadly in earnest. I've known of plenty of cases of poor devils in bad as I am, who've tried to go away on the quiet, under new names, and live down their pasts. They've

lived for a while, maybe for years, in a perfect purgatory of fear of discovery. Invariably it has happened. Then it's hell!

"Nothing like that for me! I want to go to a new town where I can make my first impression without the handicap of preconceived prejudices and lay my case in its very worst colors right before them at the beginning. Then I'll have nothing to cover, nothing to worry about. If they let me stay and have decent work, then the worst is over right at the word go. I believe I'll find a town where I'll get that chance. So do your worst, and do it now."

Warren studied the face of the speaker long and curiously.

"By gad!" he admitted at last, "I believe you're fool enough to do it. It won't work if it's a bluff, for I'm going to take you up. Needn't expect any softness from me, young man. Not much! If you have one of your cute little tricks up your sleeve, it's a danged queer one, and I'm just sport enough to play the goat so I can see your hand. Let me tell you, though, you're more of a fool than I think you are if you expect to find a town that will fall for you. There ain't such a place!

"Take this," he directed, turning to his stenographer.

Bradwell, in spite of himself, winced at times, as the remarkable "letter of discredit" unfolded. Thus it ran:

"Collinsville, New York,

"April 18, 1912.

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

"The bearer, George Bradwell, who was born and reared in this town, has been a harum-scarum, ne'er-do-well from babyhood. Two years ago his foolishly indulgent father died, leaving nothing but this son, on whom he had wasted a liberal education. Out of respect to his father's memory I took the boy into my office at a law student. Abusing the advantage of his position, he forged my name to checks and collected thereby one thousand dollars before I confronted him with his guilt. He received, on the ground of youth and first proved offense, only a light sentence—one year in State prison—which he has just completed.

"On his release he returned here, and in a drunken fury threatened me with bodily injury. Happening to be sober to-day, however, he has thought better of his threats, and at his own unusual request I have written this letter. Should he ever present it to any-

one, I will be glad to verify the statements herein contained, in case any reader desires to communicate with me. I warn any one seeking to help him that I consider his alleged reform a dubious one.

"Very respectfully,

"AMOS WARREN.

"Is that all correct and satisfactory?" sneered the author of the damnatory epistle.

"Not quite," Bradwell protested. "You speak of my 'first proved offense.' Have I ever been accused of a crime before?"

"No," admitted the other, with evident reluctance.

"Have I ever, to your knowledge, committed a punishable offense? Of course I don't count stealing melons and smashing windows," he added with a grin.

"You've never been caught, as far as I can say," assented Warren with a shrug.

"Then write it down. Give the devil his due, Mr. Warren."

"Humph! All right! Take this postscript, Miss Darcy:

"P. S.—I would add, in justice to the bearer, that, owing either to lack of opportunity or good luck in not being caught, the crime for which he was convicted is his only criminal offense up to date, as far as I know—A. W.

"That all right now?"

"Entirely," agreed Bradwell. "Of course I like to think I'm not yellow all through, as your letter implies. I did what I did in fits of recklessness. I'd been accustomed to take dad's money where I found it. I somehow wasn't able at the time to see clearly the vast difference between that and stealing from my employer."

A grunt was the only reply. Warren turned to his desk with an impatient gesture of dismissal.

Bradwell, while he waited for his letter to be typed, glared for a moment at the bent back, his fists opening and closing spasmodically. Then with a sudden revulsion of feeling he grinned and relaxed.

"So-long, Susie," he flung at the young-old stenographer as he accepted the letter she ungraciously thrust at him. "Don't let him get into trouble while I'm away."

That self-righteous representative of vil-lage sentiment glared straight through him and added an audible sniff for good measure.

"There, little girl, don't cry," he chuckled, and swaggered out, closing the door after him with exaggerated care.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRUISER'S PHILOSOPHY.

ON the steps outside, Bradwell's assumed manner of *débonair* insolence, so habitual in his old days, so seldom worn in this last bitter year, was cast aside like a distasteful garment. He stood again with clenched fists, his good resolutions wavering in the balance.

"I'd like to go back and smear the godly old shyster all over the top of his desk!" he growled. "Too bad I didn't do it while I was drunk and feeling morally irresponsible. I'm almost sorry I promised myself not to get drunk again."

A young woman came around the corner at that moment, caught his eye for an instant, then stared rigidly ahead of her as she walked primly by without other sign that she had seen him than a slightly heightened color.

"Being the same young person who was so blamed glad to let me spend a considerable part of my ill-gotten gains on her no longer than two years ago," he mused bitterly. "They're all like her in this smug little burg—one thousand two hundred and fifty self-righteous goo-goos by the census of 1910. And every last one of 'em but a few of the old fogies was a friend of mine less than two years ago."

Two small boys came down the street. As they sighted him there were giggling whispers. Then one fell in behind the other and placed his hands on his companion's shoulders. They marched by in exaggerated lock-step, stealing glances at Bradwell.

Loafers on the hotel steps guffawed their appreciation.

"When was you fellers let out of Sing Sing?" called one of them.

"Think I'd have quite a pleasant time if I stayed around here," sighed Bradwell.

He crossed the street and entered the battered hotel where he had spent the night before.

"Good morning, jolly old pals," he called

defiantly at the loafers on the steps, but got only sheepish grins in response.

As he passed the bar door on his way to the desk he caught the odor of stale beer, a sickening reminder of the unsavory night he had put in. He had another revulsion of feeling.

"I'm afraid I didn't make a very high bid for public reinstatement," he admitted. "Yet I've little ground for getting hot."

His bill paid, he collected his meager baggage and went over to the dingy little station, where he sat in solitude on a baggage-truck and pondered in chastened mood while he waited for the train to Buffalo.

When he had returned to his native village twenty-four hours before he was in wavering mind as to the details of his future course. A letter to Warren a week before his discharge had brought no response from that implacable foe. Nevertheless, he had returned with the incidental purpose of giving his birthplace an opportunity to be charitable if it would, but primarily to prove to himself and his old acquaintances that he had the courage to face them.

In his first purpose he had failed utterly. In his second and main design he had been too successful, he felt now. He had gone beyond his objective, to use a military figure, and failed to consolidate his gains. And there was some question in his mind if he was even retreating now in good order.

In other words, stung by the rebuff of his old associates, he had passed from humble but courageous facing of public censure to arrogant and outrageous defiance.

On his first arrival he had gone straight to Warren's office with the proposition that the old lawyer reemploy him and give him opportunity to make good and gradually pay back the money he had stolen. The old man had ordered him out without listening to him.

Still undaunted, he had sought employment from each of the two village storekeepers, from the local coal-dealer and produce-buyer, and others, finally offering himself as laborer to near-by farmers he met at the stores. Emphatic refusals, some cold, some decidedly heated, were the net results.

His social attempts had brought like returns. He had essayed calls on two house-

holds with whom his family had formerly been most intimate. In each case the "hired girl" had pointedly reported no one at home.

Brooding over his day of failure at the dismal hotel that evening, he had found companionship in a bibulous traveling man who at dinner-time had already begun to drown out his disgust at having to spend the night in a "dead burg." Starting with the common bond of grievances against Collinsville, the pair had made a night of it, to the delight of the local loafers and the horror of the rest of the village.

But it was not the remorse of the morning after which had prompted his quixotic demand for the letter of discredit, though it had served to stiffen his wavering resolution. His determination to start life over again on the square, with nothing to conceal, he owed to old Bruiser McMahan, a fellow prisoner who had shared a bench with him in the prison-shop.

The Bruiser, as he was known in the underworld, was an habitual criminal, with three years yet to run on his fifth State's-prison sentence, not counting several minor jail terms. Under his case-hardened exterior he had retained a spark of human kindness that had rekindled on contact with his whole-hearted young bench-mate. In whispered fragments as they worked they had exchanged experiences.

"There's nothin' to this reform thing, believe me, kid! I've tried it," was the Bruiser's dictum. "I wasn't no more crook than what you was when they sent me up first time. A guy skins me for my little wad at a crooked poker game one night, an' I jest nacherly beat him up outside an' takes it back. I gets six months in stir. I comes out hell-bent on cuttin' out the booze an' card games an' the tough bunch. I was for a new deal.

"I changes my name, goes to a new burg, gets a good job, an' was makin' good. Did they give me a chance? Not! My rep follows me. Somebody wises the boss to me bein' an ex-con, an' I gits the bounce. I tries seven new burgs an' seven new monnikers before I gives up. No use. So I goes back to the hold-up game, an' here I be. I'll go back to it again when I'm out o'

here. I'll be a wrong un till I croak, an' so will you, kid, believe me! So will you!

"But you, now, you got a good graft. You're a Gentleman Jim. If I could 'a' handled a pen like you I'd 'a' laid by a pile by now, believe me. But I got nothin' but my two fists to work with. Don't kid yourself with this startin'-over stuff. They'll get next to ye every time. Play the game now yer in it."

Bradwell had pondered long over the Bruiser's advice. He, too, had been planning flight to a distant city and a new name, and a fresh start. His fellow-prisoner's experience gave him dismal pause. His adventurous young blood leaped momentarily at the prospect of excitement in the career of a gentlemanly soldier of fortune. But he came of honest stock, and was essentially honest himself despite his one hectic year of crime on which he had embarked in a moment of thoughtless impulse. On second consideration his whole being revolted against a return to it.

So gradually he shaped a philosophy of his own and formed his resolution.

"Bruiser," he whispered to his bench-mate a week before his discharge, "I've thought it all over. I'm going to take your tip on the starting-over game, but I'm going to copper it. You're right about not trying to change my name and hide my past. I'm going somewhere on my own name and tell 'em all about myself at the start. When I find a place that 'll take me on my record and give me a chance, I'm going to stick, and I'm going to go straight and make good. And Bruiser, old boy, I won't forget you. You've given me a good tip. When you're out of here I'll be in a position to give you an honest job, and I'll send for you,"

"Yer heart's in the right place, kid, but yer plumb nutty, plumb nutty," was the Bruiser's only comment.

CHAPTER III.

TESTING HUMAN NATURE.

THE day following his farewell to his native village found Bradwell beginning his test of human charity. He had picked upon Buffalo as the nearest large

city. His limited appropriation for carfare had to be considered. Moreover, it was the one city with which he was fairly familiar.

It was a theory of his that the city would give him a better chance than the village. Not only were there more openings, but he believed the large-town mind was broader, less personal, less concerned with the details of a man's private life.

Bradwell had real liking and aptitude for the law despite the very sketchy nature of the reading he had done during his frivolous year with old Warren. He determined to make an effort to enter a Buffalo office, complete his studies, and ultimately get his citizenship restored and be admitted to the bar.

So he began making the rounds of the offices and scanning the classified ads. It was altogether a disillusioning and heart-breaking day. And there were many more like it to follow.

His first call was on one of the largest firms in the city. Among some fifty other applicants he waited in the anteroom for nearly two hours before his turn came for an interview with a self-important managing clerk.

That functionary read the letter of discredit through with an indignant scowl, which deepened as he proceeded.

He thrust the letter back to the bearer with insulting emphasis.

"Are you crazy?" he sneered. "Think that letter would get you anything here? I should say not! We have a hard enough time finding honest men who are competent. We don't hire crooks."

Bradwell faced him with speechless rage while the fellow rang for an office boy.

"Show this man out and bring in the next specimen," the manager snapped when the boy appeared.

Then Bradwell found his voice and his composure.

"Just one moment, honest old sir," he said, in a voice that had an ominous sound under the banter. "You've got that letter just a bit wrong. It gives you a perfect right to call me an ex-convict and an ex-crook. But I'm very particular about that 'ex' thing. It's about all I've got to be proud of at present. You implied just now

that I'm still a crook. I'm not; but I'm still reckless at times. I have a strong leaning to assault and battery right now, for instance. I'm going to give you a running start, though, seeing it's your busy morning. But I'd suggest if you ever catch yourself about to meet me on the street you'd better turn right around and go the same way I'm going, only quicker. Otherwise you may find yourself shortly minus the righteous old bean."

Bradwell walked out past the grinning office boy without waiting to hear the verbal explosion that followed him as soon as the managing clerk found his voice.

"The front end of a perfect day," thought the caller, as he started for the next place on his list.

There followed several calls in which he got no further than the office boy, who took his letter in and returned with the perfunctory report that there was "no vacancy" or that "the place had just been filled."

Toward evening he reached another managing clerk, this a human one who received him politely and asked him tactful questions.

"I get your point of view entirely, Mr. Bradwell," he said at last. "I admire your pluck and believe in your sincerity. I think you've learned your lesson and will go straight. But I'm afraid I can't help you here. I wish I could, but I can't. The law's peculiar. A lot of us lawyers ought to be in jail, no doubt. Some are. Nevertheless, we're very jealous of our reputations. The firm here are real he-men, and I think would help you if they could, but our clients might feel uneasy if we had some one around who'd had the bad luck to be on the wrong side of the law at one time. Especially one who insisted on every one knowing that fact."

"Flowers upon the victim's brow and the ax upon his neck," pronounced Bradwell grimly.

"Not at all! Not at all!" the other protested. "I believe you can make good in something else, and I'd be glad to help you if I can. Why not give up the law and try something less exacting about records?"

"Something like being cashier for a bank, for instance," suggested Bradwell sarcastically.

"Well," laughed the other, "there are other exacting professions besides the law, to be sure. If you say the word, though, I'll keep you in mind and may have something to suggest later."

"Thanks," Bradwell assented heartily. "Your heart's O. K. I'll give the law a few more whirls, though, and if I find you're right I'll come back and surrender."

His second and third day yielded no better fruit. Most of his rebuffs were curt. A few were kindly. One lawyer had him brought into his private office and questioned him at length as to his experiences only to turn him away coldly in the end with the calm statement that he had merely talked with him out of curiosity. Another, more well-meaning, advised him to go to the Prisoners' Aid Association, whose officers were in the business of getting employment for men in Bradwell's position.

"Thanks; no," Bradwell declined with emphasis. "I may be driven to selling pencils on a street-corner before I get through, but I don't want any philanthropy."

It was three days later when his little fund was nearly drained out that he got his first encouragement. He had just met an unusually obdurate office boy of the overgrown and officious type in the outworks of a particularly desirable firm. No amount of either dignity or cajolery on Bradwell's part served to get him entrée even to the managing clerk.

As he was turning away, baffled, he caught, through a half-open inner office door, bearing the name of the head of the firm, a glimpse of a face that appealed to him. He made up his mind to talk to that man.

It meant two hours of lying in wait in the outer hall, but he accomplished his purpose. The man emerged at length.

"This is Mr. Foster, isn't it?" Bradwell ventured.

"Yes," the other assented. "What can I do for you?"

"Pardon me for waylaying you like this, but your office boy wouldn't give me a regu-

lar chance at you. Would you mind glancing over that letter? I'm looking for a place in a law office."

He handed Foster the letter and studied the man's face for signs of encouragement while he read it.

Foster perused a few words and then glanced up with alert interest.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I've heard of you. You're the young chap Cartwright was telling us about at the Lawyers' Club the other evening. You called at his office, I believe, and got turned down. We had quite a discussion of your case."

He finished reading the letter with great interest.

"H-m! A remarkable document! I'd like to hear your experiences with it if I had time. I'm in a hurry now. I haven't a thing here for you, but I'll tell you who has. Step back in the office a minute and I'll get his address."

"John, get this gentleman old J. B. Matthews's address, over in Ellicott Square. I can't think of it offhand," he directed the lordly office boy.

"You see old Matthews, and tell him I sent you," he added to Bradwell. "And say, if you don't mind, I'd appreciate it greatly if you'd call me up this afternoon and tell me how you come out. I've a particular reason for wanting to know."

CHAPTER IV.

A SPORTING PROPOSITION.

J. B. MATTHEWS did not appeal to Bradwell at first sight. He was one of those large and laboriously impressive men with a manner oily to the point of greasiness.

And there was a grating undertone to the overunctious cordiality of his greeting that somehow gave Bradwell the impression that he was not exactly glad to see him despite the promptness with which Foster's sponsorship gained him admission.

"Ah, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, "I'm—ah—very glad to see you—to be sure. I've heard of you. So Mr. Foster sent you to me? Did he—ah—by any chance—ah—intimate why he sent you?"

"No. He merely said he had talked about me with you and others at your club, and that he felt sure you would have a place for me."

"H-m! To be sure! Quite so! H-m! I'm very glad indeed to help a young man who's been—ah—unfortunate and sees his mistake and—ah—proposes to reform; very glad indeed. This letter of yours—most unusual. Very commendable of you, too, I may add, and augurs well for your good intentions and sincerity. You want it back, of course. Now let me introduce you to my managing clerk. He will acquaint you with your duties."

Bradwell followed him to the outer office, rather dazed at the suddenness and mystery of this ending of his quest, and uncertain whether or not to feel gratified at it.

"This old boy sounds a little hollow to me," he thought.

The managing clerk was a nervous, apologetic, middle-aged little man, whose face betrayed his surprise and disapproval when his chief introduced the new office member.

"Mr. Chester, this is Mr. Bradwell, who is to read law with us and make himself generally useful. You may put him on the pay-roll for ten dollars a week and arrange a desk for him."

With this brief explanation Matthews left him.

"Well—well!" fussed the little clerk. "This is unexpected! I didn't know Mr. Matthews was planning an addition to the staff. We really hadn't a vacancy. We have two young men in that capacity already. I don't know where we'll find a desk for you. But pardon me! That's neither here nor there! What Mr. Matthews says goes, of course. Dare say we can give you something to do. Where were you employed before, Mr. Bradwell?"

This perfunctorily polite question showed that the fussy Mr. Chester did not yet know he had acquired an ex-convict as an understudy. Bradwell's familiar imp at once asserted itself.

"My last job was in Auburn prison," he replied.

Chester looked doubtful.

"Ah, you were a State employee?"

"No; a State guest."

Still there was bewilderment.

"I see you haven't seen the letter that got me the job," Bradwell elucidated, handing him the letter of discredit.

The other read it with amazement and horror.

"Do you mean to say you showed this letter to Mr. Matthews? You're not a practical joker, are you?"

"I did, and I'm not," replied Bradwell succinctly.

Chester, letter in hand, fluttered into Matthews's office and was gone many minutes. When he returned his face was flushed angrily. He was still nervous and fussy, but he was no longer apologetic. Indeed, from that moment on, as long as Bradwell stayed with the firm, the managing clerk was barely polite to him, and made it clear in many ways that he dealt with him only under protest.

Bradwell was greatly curious as to why he had been so promptly employed in an office which apparently had no use for him, and whose members seemed to find him personally distasteful. So he determined that when he telephoned Mr. Foster, as he had promised, he would demand an explanation.

Before returning from luncheon he called up his sponsor from a public booth.

"Took you, did he? I had a feeling old Matthews wouldn't make good," Foster exclaimed, when Bradwell told him the news. "I thought he'd back down on the pinch. I hope you make good, though."

"Thank you, Mr. Foster, I'll do my best," he replied. "But what I want to know is why he did it. The old man made a great show of being cordial, but underneath it I could see he didn't take to the idea a little bit. And as for that man Chester, his managing clerk, he can't see me for a minute. The thing looks a little phoney to me. How about it?"

"Well, my boy, I don't like to hurt your feelings, but I'll tell you as long as you insist, and I hope you won't let it make any difference to you. As a matter of fact, the old man had to take you to save his face, and incidentally to win a little bet he was forced into the other night. Matthews is a

pretty stubborn old party, and he also likes to make out he's very liberal-minded.

"When we got to discussing you at the club, as I told you, most of us said frankly that, however sorry we felt for you, we wouldn't dare take a chance on having you around our offices in view of the prejudices of our clients and your bent for publicity. Matthews got off a lot of high-sounding stuff about charity and the helping-hand, so I took him up and offered to bet him a hundred that he wouldn't take you in himself if you applied to him. He was in so far that he had to take the bet, but I'll warrant he's been praying ever since that he wouldn't be put to the test."

"So I'm a sort of a sporting proposition to the lawyers of Buffalo!" Bradwell remarked a little resentfully.

"Well, you strike me as a pretty good sport yourself. Your feelings ought not to be hurt very badly. I'd call it a piece of good luck and let it go at that if I were you," Foster concluded.

CHAPTER V.

LOADED DICE.

BUT though the sporting instincts of the head of the firm had won Bradwell his place, it became quickly evident that the office in general did not propose to follow it up by giving him a sporting chance to make good. The little managing clerk from the start spent his days devising disagreeable jobs for him. The rest of the underlings, clerks, stenographers, and office boys took their cue from the manager, and snubbed him consistently.

Though Matthews continued outwardly cordial to a sickening degree, Bradwell had an instinctive feeling that he at least tacitly abetted this baiting. He felt sure that under the pretext of being a good sport the old man played with loaded dice.

Bradwell, who was an essentially social being, found this ostracism corroding to his disposition. As time went on his natural buoyancy began to flatten out under the strain. He had taken a room at the Y. M. C. A., but had not yet made any acquaintances there who were congenial to one of

his temperament. His resolution to keep away from the speedier night life of the city might have weakened had he possessed money enough to feed his appetite for gaiety.

As it was he was driven within himself, and to forestall too much brooding, he spent his evenings with his law books. He studied as he had never supposed before that it was possible for him to study.

And then, in a manner as strange and unexpected as his employment by Matthews, he formed an acquaintance that bade fair to develop into a friendship.

He was starting for luncheon one day after a particularly disheartening forenoon when he was accosted by a young man at the exit of the building. He recognized him at once as a caller who had spent some time that morning in low-toned conversation with Chester, the managing clerk.

"Good morning, Mr. Bradwell," he said. "Worden is my name, of Guthrie, Sandford and Pierson. I've seen you in Matthews's office. Chester was telling me about you this morning."

The débonair, friendly face and manner of the stranger won Bradwell at once, and he cordially acknowledged the self-introduction. Then a second thought chilled him.

"Are you another of the bunch of giddy sports who seem to be monkeying with my destiny? I don't just swallow the notion that the kind of 'Who's Who' my old pal Chester 'd lay before you would make you long for my acquaintance for my simple worth alone. That boy loves me almost as much as an old maid loves snakes."

Worden laughed heartily.

"I haven't any delusions about Chester's size-up of a man," he protested. "The little shrimp has skimmed milk in his veins and sweetbreads for brains. From the knocking he gave you I decided you must have something to you. Besides, I liked your looks, and the facts about you that I boiled out of Chester's drool interested me. No, I haven't made a bet with anybody on your case. I heard how old Matthews got caught."

"Yes, I'm with him only because he hasn't the face to fire me just now. I

realize that. It isn't a very pleasant position, but I can't be too finicky."

"The deuce you can't! I tell you what you do. Go and tell old Matthews to rub your job in his hair. Come over to our place. I can get you in there, and I know it."

"How do you know it, and why do you want me?"

"I know it because I'm managing clerk and have something to say about it, and because I know the kind of men the firm want, men with nerve and determination and straightforward fearlessness such as you've proved you've got."

"Well, I'm sure I'm grateful for the offer, but I'm going to stick it out here at least till they throw me out. I won't give them the satisfaction of getting my goat."

"Well, as I've said, I like your nerve, but I'll tell you right now you'll never get anywhere with old Matthews. He'll figure out some scheme to get rid of you in such a way that they won't give him the laugh for backing down, even if he has to poison your soup or something. And all the while he'll be as friendly and oily on the surface as a buttered wheat-cake."

"I'll certainly remember you if I get the bounce from Matthews."

"Do. And meantime I hope we get better acquainted."

They did. In the weeks that followed they frequently lunched together and occasionally went out for an evening, after Bradwell had made it clear that he had nothing to live on but his ten dollars a week, and that his outings must accordingly be infrequent and exceedingly inexpensive.

So with this meager measure of companionship, Bradwell found life more endurable. He could not help liking Worden. Yet he was conscious of mental reservations toward him. He failed to understand the man's mysterious eagerness to get him into his own firm.

There came sooner than he expected an opportunity to test the genuineness of his new acquaintance. The combined efforts of his office associates to get rid of the white elephant old Matthews's abortive sporting instincts had foisted on them had proved vain. Bradwell had blithely ignored

snubs. He had cheerfully performed elaborately disagreeable tasks. He had invariably kept his temper. He had worked hard, and with constant vigilance had avoided giving his chief any possible excuse for discharging him.

Then a fortuitous and ridiculously insignificant incident turned the trick.

The big inner office, occupied by Matthews, contained the firm's law library. Here with the books Bradwell spent such time as he had free from Chester's uninteresting assignments.

The head of the firm smoked a certain brand of expensive cigars and always kept a box of them in his desk. Two or three times Bradwell had caught the office boy leaning out of a window in the outer hall smoking a man's-size cigar which, with the fleeting glimpse Bradwell caught of it, resembled the Matthews brand.

One day he was reading just back of a bookcase. Matthews had left the room for a moment, leaving his desk unlocked. Bradwell heard a stealthy step, and looked out in time to see the boy tiptoe in, take a handful of cigars from the old man's desk, and sneak out again, unconscious that he had been observed.

A few minutes later, just as Bradwell was leaving the room, Matthews returned. Bradwell had barely reached his desk when the chief bounced out of his office. He was very red in the face, and all his suave manner had vanished in a flash. He strode straight to Bradwell's desk and, pointing a pudgy finger within an inch of his nose, roared:

"Get out of here at once! Get your pay and go! Here I trusted you as I would a man with a decent reputation, and you're up to your old tricks again. I expected it all the time."

Bradwell had sprung to his feet in amazement and anger. Work in the office was suspended. Every eye was on him. He had not the remotest idea of what charge his employer was bringing. His conscience was clear, but his bewilderment left him for a moment at a disadvantage. Meantime the chief stormed on to the delight of all his audience save one.

"Just what are you accusing me of?"

Bradwell stammered at length, when the old man paused for breath.

"You know perfectly well. I've trusted you alone in my office day after day. I suppose you thought because I did that I wasn't keeping close track of things. I was, though. You've stolen at least ten dollars' worth of my cigars since you came here."

This anticlimax overcame Bradwell with relief and amusement. He laughed in the old blusterer's face.

"Perfectly shameless!" snorted his accuser.

"Now, Mr. Matthews," Bradwell soothed, "don't take it too hard. I am a bit entertained at your idea of trustfulness when you've been leaving your cigars out where they'd tempt me, hoping I'd fall for it, and counting them carefully each time you came in so you'd know when I did. But I didn't. I've never touched one of your jolly old smokes. I happen to know who did, though, and could probably prove it by searching certain pockets.

"However, I won't. There's, honor among us thieves, you know, and I'm not a snitcher. I've no way of proving my innocence excepting by convicting another poor devil. I've suffered too much myself to want to put any one else in bad. Don't forget, though, that you have no proof against me. As for the salary due me, I relinquish it. Buy yourself a new box of cigars out of it, and with the balance buy my dear little friend Chester a pair of pink spats.

"Meanwhile I'll add your interesting and heinous charge as a footnote to my little letter of discredit, together with the conclusive proof you offer to support your indictment, and I'll be on my way."

Without waiting for further comment, Bradwell took his hat and departed.

CHAPTER VI.

WORDEN MAKES GOOD.

A HALF-HOUR after his summary departure from J. B. Matthews—under a cloud of tobacco-smoke, as it were—Bradwell had presented himself before his

friend Worden, in the office of Guthrie, Sandford and Pierson.

"Mr. Matthews, I believe!" exclaimed Worden cheerily. "Oh, no! I'm mistaken. It's only his junior partner. You two are so much alike! Or have you come over to tell me the old man has retired and you're the new head of the firm?"

"Not just like that," Bradwell grinned. "I dropped in to tell you that I came near resigning about a half an hour ago."

"Well, why in thunder didn't you?" the other demanded indignantly.

"Old Matthews beat me to it by about a second."

"You mean the old cuss fired you?"

"Just like that."

"Well, I'll be hanged! Served you right for not going while the going was good, as I tipped you off to do. I'm glad of it, though, as long as you wouldn't go any other way. Now we'll have you in a decent firm. Tell father all about it. Have a cheap cigar while you talk—to take the taste of Matthews's thirty-five centers out of your mouth."

Bradwell rehearsed the recent scene in Matthews's office with embellishments that made his friend whoop with glee.

"Come on in and tell it to Mr. Guthrie," Worden chuckled, when Bradwell had finished. "He hates old Matthews, and your yarn 'll tickle him right."

He led the way into the office of the senior member of the firm.

Guthrie was one of those lean men of the indolently comfortable type physically. There was, however, in the depths of his humorous gray eyes at moments a flicker of crafty alertness.

His appreciation of Bradwell's experience was all that Worden predicted, though his expression of it was less boisterous than that of his managing clerk.

"I like your sense of humor, Mr. Bradwell," he commented. "Trouble with old Matthews is, he hasn't any. I knew you wouldn't last there. Worden has told me all about you, and nearly persuaded me to give you a try-out after you got through there. I'd like to see that famous letter of yours, by the way."

Bradwell handed it over, and Guthrie

considered it long and thoughtfully. Then he studied Bradwell's face with cool intentness until the subject winced in spite of himself.

"So you're something of a pen artist—eh?" the lawyer exclaimed at length, breaking the spell with a sudden return to smiling geniality. "Well, if you could forge this old Warren's name well enough to get away with it, you can probably forge mine as well. It will be an asset here. I have a vast amount of routine correspondence that doesn't require my close attention, but does need my signature. I haven't time to sign the whole stack every day, so that would be one job you could handle, perhaps. Let me see how well you can write my name with this as a sample."

He scrawled his name across a blank sheet of paper and handed it to Bradwell. The latter studied each letter carefully; then, with a practised flourish, wrote the name a number of times.

"I guess the last two or three are fairly good imitations," he said as he handed the sheet back.

"Very good, indeed," Guthrie admitted. "Now try it without the model before you."

He pushed over a fresh sheet. When Bradwell handed it back with another facsimile of the lawyer's signature, he again caught the crafty gleam in the gray eyes, and again he felt vaguely uncomfortable. He quickly dismissed the feeling, however, under the influence of Guthrie's good fellowship.

The upshot of the interview was Bradwell's engagement by the firm at two dollars a week more than Matthews had paid him. He was convinced that at last he had won a place on the strength of his personality with a group of men broad-minded enough to believe that he would make good in spite of his past. His original bewilderment over Worden's sudden fancy for him had been forgotten. He was easier in his mind than at any time since his arrest nearly two years before.

Sandford and Pierson, the two junior members of the firm, he saw little of. They were solemn, middle-aged individuals who spent most of their time over briefs in their

private offices. Guthrie was the firm's brownstone front. He it was who met all clients and appeared in court in all important cases.

As for the actual importance of these cases, it was largely relative. Bradwell soon noted that the firm represented no big interests. While they had a large volume of practise, it was confined for the most part to the legal affairs and civil litigations of lesser business men.

He discovered, too, that the greater and by far the most interesting portion of the cases had to do with the Great Lakes shipping, the affairs of that myriad of sails and funnels that sweep the great inland seas of which Buffalo is one of the chief ports.

Was a tugboat fouled by a liner's screw, the owner brought suit for damages through Guthrie, Sandford and Pierson. Did an unseaworthy old tramp go down in a storm, Guthrie, Sandford and Pierson went after the insurance money and adjusted the claims for cargoes lost. Many a barge-owner whose decrepit property had sagged apart under its own weight when its latest coat of fresh paint failed to hold it together, collected insurance money sufficient to put a new craft afloat, through the ability of his legal backers.

To Bradwell, inland born and bred, the fresh romance of the open water appealed so strongly that for the time it diverted his attention from any question of ethics in connection with these cases. Then one day he learned that in practically every instance where the firm was engaged as counsel in marine insurance cases, the owner of the lost or damaged vessel had taken out his insurance through Guthrie, Sandford and Pierson. He began to have vague suspicions for which he had no tangible foundation.

He recalled again Worden's mysterious eagerness to get him into the office, and the subtle craftiness in the eyes of the senior member of the firm. The more he pondered on it, the greater grew his uneasiness.

His perturbation became more pronounced as he casually learned, in one way and another, that at least three of the elder clerks of the firm who worked out

of sight in the inner office for the most were disbarred attorneys with decidedly discreditable records.

At last suspicion took tangible form. He was now convinced that these people who had seemed so eager for his services were engaged in a practise that was "sharp," to say the least, and perhaps actually criminal. Had his own past record, then, been a positive point in his favor, and had they employed him with the hope that his reform was not too genuine?

CHAPTER VII.

HIS FACILE PEN.

WITHIN a few days after this disquieting suspicion crystallized in Bradwell's mind, a series of swift-moving events turned it into definite knowledge. These incidents pivoted on his ability as a penman, of which the head of the firm had made so much at the time of his employment. What had been a passing mystery to him at the moment was made clear, and at the same time he was filled with disgust at the ease with which he had temporarily been lulled to sleep.

His task of signing the routine letters of the office with the name of the head of the firm had seemed at first only a minor one even among the vast number of petty jobs that fall to the lot of a student clerk in a law office. He dubbed himself the human rubber stamp and enlivened the irksome, routine job each day with a running fire of humorous comment that greatly entertained the stenographic force.

But he was too active-minded to perform even such humdrum work in an entirely perfunctory way. He formed the habit of glancing over the letters he signed, with the idea of making himself familiar with some of the details of the firm's business. After a week or so he began to note a growing importance in the nature of some of these letters. He was pleased at first to think this was evidence of Guthrie's growing confidence in him. Occasionally a client, too, would dictate a letter in the office and not wait for a copy, leaving Bradwell to imitate his signature.

Then one day he noted a document so significant that he felt sure it must have slipped into the routine pile by mistake. He referred it to Worden, the managing clerk.

"Don't worry your head about any of those letters," Worden ruled, passing the paper back after a hasty glance at it. "You can rest assured the boss has gone carefully over everything of importance. He's just one of these guys who's got the art of saving himself trouble down to a science. What's the use of his climbing onto a pen handle and grinding out his monniker when you can make a set of scratches he can't tell from his own? Hence your princely income, my son."

Silenced but still a bit uneasy, Bradwell returned to his work. The merest tyro at the law would know that some of the documents he had signed for Guthrie would never hold in court if the genuineness of the signature were disproved. It puzzled him that so shrewd a lawyer would follow so slipshod a practise.

Two or three days later he learned the method back of this apparent madness.

After starting for home in the evening, he had returned to the office for a moment to get a paper he had forgotten. There was no one there but Worden and Guthrie, who were talking in Guthrie's office and did not hear him come in.

"Well," the head of the firm was saying, "Bradwell's facile pen saved our client a snug fortune on that Bay City contract. If he'd had to deliver one cargo at that contract price, with the bottom gone out of the market as it is, we'd be handling an assignment for him now. I convinced 'em that Jennings had changed his mind after dictating the contract, and that by mistake an officious new clerk had sent it through after putting the old man's signature on. At least I convinced 'em they couldn't prove the contrary after they called in a handwriting shark and paid him a fee to tell 'em the signature was bogus. Some little find Bradwell was!"

The subject of this illuminating explanation heard no more, for he hurried out as quietly as he had come in.

He had heard enough. It was clear now

beyond question that his job of forging signatures was not a mere labor-saving device. He was using his unfortunate skill to afford a gang of crooked lawyers and their crooked clients a means of getting out from under their written agreements whenever they chose.

As he thought back over some of the important letters and documents he had signed, he could recall at least a dozen instances where his crafty employers might have made use of his skill to pocket the equivalent of a good many years of his salary. Evidently they had intended to let his position dawn on him gradually, trusting that he was innately a crook and would readily fall in with them.

With that thought of his meager salary, a suggestion planted itself in his mind and took root, despite every effort of his will to tear it out. It assumed the form of a leering but alluring devil, and peered at him from the pages of the law book he vainly tried to read intelligently that evening. It haunted his dreams. It was with him in the morning as he walked slowly and thoughtfully to the office.

Here was his great opportunity. Guthrie and his gang were doubtless clever enough to keep on the technically safe side of the law. It would be safe to work with them for a while. On the other hand, they could not afford to have their methods made public. He had them at his mercy if he worked cautiously.

He would lie low and appear to fall in with their ideas. He would gather evidence for future use. When he had them where he wanted them, he would demand his share of the plunder. When he was admitted to the bar, he would demand a partnership.

Then when he had a good sum laid away and a personal practise established, he would break away from the firm, choosing the moment when he could make his departure a spectacular protest against dubious legal methods that he could not tolerate. He would be touted as a scrupulous, honest lawyer who had lived down the one mistake of his foolish youth.

He was still weaving the golden webs of this vision of his future when he sat

down to his morning's work. He had reached the point where, his professional career assured, there rose up in the background of the dream a little suburban home. There was a garden and, of course, a gardener.

"Just the job for old Bruiser McMahon," he thought, suddenly remembering his despondent, old fellow-convict, to whom he had impulsively promised an honest job.

Bruiser McMahon! His glowing thoughts suddenly went cold. His desk became a rough bench; the click of the typewriters the rattle of the prison shop machinery.

He seemed to see the Bruiser's seamed old face beside him and hear him whisper:

"I'll be a wrong'un till I croak, an' so will you, kid, believe me! So will you."

Bradwell's golden vision had vanished. He shuddered with horror like a sleep-walker who has suddenly awakened at the verge of a precipice.

Was the Bruiser right, after all? Was he, Bradwell, with all his fine and spectacular resolutions, after all only one of those unfortunate moral defectives who instinctively tended toward crooked ways; to whom good resolve was but mental froth? Here he was, welcoming with enthusiasm the first real temptation that had come his way!

"No!" he almost shouted aloud. "They won't get me that way! What a weak fool I am! I'll chuck this job if I have to dig ditches for a living!"

"Got a mad on this morning or just having a bad dream," said Worden, who had been at his elbow for a full moment unnoticed. "Come out of your daze just long enough to sign old Peterson's name to this document, will you? He dictated it the other day and went away before it was typed. Here's a letter from him with his signature to copy."

Warned by this familiar formula, Bradwell read the document through carefully. Peterson was a small lake trader who speculated in cargoes of various sorts. He owned no vessels of his own, but had recently chartered the *Mary Lee*, a decrepit, old, repainted schooner belonging to one of Guthrie's clients. She had sailed for

Duluth three days before, insured to the limit, and with Peterson himself aboard acting as supercargo. These facts had all happened to come under Bradwell's notice.

Now the statement which Bradwell had just been directed to sign with Peterson's name was an alleged deposition by the old trader stating that he had been warned by the owners of the *Mary Lee* that she was in none-too-seaworthy condition and that he therefore took her at his own risk and absolved the owners and their legal representatives of all risk in case of accident. Beside the signature blank was the usual blank for attesting the signature before a notary.

Bradwell hesitated for only an instant after reading this statement. Then he walked firmly over to Worden's desk.

"Look here, Worden," he said, "I suppose you intend to attest this signature as a notary public."

Worden eyed him keenly for a moment.

"Well, what of it?" he evaded. "It's all the same as long as we know the old man dictated the statement and gave us *carte blanche* to sign his name. It's just a matter of form."

"It would be more than a matter of form if the ship went down," Bradwell insisted. "You know perfectly well this thing wouldn't hold in court if it were proved the signature was forged, and further that it isn't legal to attest a false signature. If I've got to do things like this I don't want the job. This isn't the first thing I've had to do that I don't like the looks of, now that I look back. You may turn in my resignation to Mr. Guthrie, and I'll leave at the earliest date we can agree on as fair. You've been very friendly and I appreciate it, but I can't agree to practices like this."

"Oh, come now, old man, don't fly off the handle," Worden urged. "We want you to stay. Mr. Guthrie won't insist on this if you have scruples, I'm sure. Hand it back and I'll take it up with him."

Despite his attempt at blandness, Worden's manner hinted at ill-suppressed nervousness and irritability. He went into Guthrie's room and was closeted there for some time.

"Mr. Guthrie will see you in a little while, Bradwell," he said, when he came out. "Do you mind running over to the bank now and depositing these checks for me?"

Bradwell took the checks and went out, glad of the chance to escape for a moment from this tense atmosphere.

As he left the building a newsboy passed him calling: "Extra! All about the shipwreck!"

Bradwell bought a paper and this scare head-line smote his eyes:

SCHOONER AND CREW LOST IN STORM.

Deck-hand Sole Survivor.

A. J. Peterson, of Buffalo, Owner of Cargo,
Lost with *Mary Lee* on Lake Huron.

Bradwell gasped. The damning significance of the document he had refused to sign smote him full force. They had knowingly sent Peterson out in a rotten ship. Then, getting advance word of his death over the wire, Guthrie had forged this statement to free his clients from responsibility!

CHAPTER VIII.

ENSNARED.

BRADWELL'S first impulse was to turn back to the office without completing his errand, denounce Guthrie to his face, and sever his connection with the firm without further notice. But he found himself so shaken with disgust and rage that he decided to make his trip to the bank first and gain time to pull himself together.

He had just passed in the bank-book and bundle of checks at the cashier's window when some one touched him on the shoulder. It was Worden. His manner was sinister and when he spoke there was a cold threat in his tones.

"You haven't turned in those checks yet, have you?" he demanded. Then he added to the cashier, whom he saw already had them: "We'd like those back, please. We've just discovered at the office that there's something wrong with one of them."

Worden ran rapidly through the pile and extracted one.

"Just as I thought," he explained. "It's a forgery, made out to cash for five hundred dollars, and with Guthrie's forged name on it! Come back to the office, Bradwell. We'll take this up with the chief."

Bradwell followed the other out without a word. He was filled with forebodings. He was suddenly conscious that all sense of friendship between himself and Worden had vanished.

They entered Guthrie's private office together and Worden closed the door behind them.

"It was just as you guessed it," the managing clerk said, handing the suspected check to the head of the firm.

Guthrie looked it over carefully; then with a sardonic smile turned to Bradwell.

"I happened to look in the checkbook after you went out," he explained, "and I noticed that the last stub was blank. I guessed in an instant what had happened. So I phoned for a police officer and he's in the next room ready to make an arrest if I give the word. I may not give the word. I want to talk it over with you. What made you do such a foolish thing, especially for a little chicken-feed like this? We've always tried to treat you right, and if you'd told me you needed some money in a hurry I'd have let you have it. Force of habit too strong, I suppose."

Despite his forebodings, so sudden and unexpected and yet so insidious had come this attack that Bradwell did not realize that he was being accused until Guthrie had nearly finished speaking.

Then he leaped to his feet and advanced on his accuser with fists raised to strike.

"Do you mean to say you are accusing me!" he stormed.

Guthrie sprang back and placed his chair between them. Worden caught Bradwell's arms from behind.

"Remember what I said about the officer in the next room," Guthrie warned. "Another move like that and I'll call him in."

Bradwell realized at once that he was helpless and, still somewhat in a daze, obeyed. Guthrie pushed his advantage.

"As far as accusing you is concerned, it hardly seems necessary. Let's calmly look at the evidence as it would appeal to a jury. Just keep cool for a minute and let me present it. Here you are with a self-confessed criminal record. You claimed to have reformed, but the only job you've held since you left prison before you came here you lost on a charge of petty thieving. There are quite a number of witnesses to that. Also you were once convicted of forgery and you have been showing your skill as a penman here.

"Now you are caught red-handed trying to cash one of our checks, signed by my forged name. You had prepared for a getaway by turning in your resignation this morning. Now, with that evidence, I ask you, what chance would you have before a jury?"

"But," Bradwell protested hotly, "you know and I know that I didn't sign that check. We both know that this is simply a contemptible trick to catch me. As for providing that I have practised signing your name here, you can't put that in evidence without exposing the purposes for which you've used my penmanship here."

"Not so fast, my boy!" Guthrie interposed. "What you know and I know has nothing to do with what the jury will believe, in the first place. In the second place, I know that you did write the name at the bottom of that check, and I can prove it to any jury without dwelling embarrassingly on your duties in the office. Do you recognize that?"

Guthrie had reached into his desk and drawn out a sheet of paper on which was written his name several times. Bradwell did recognize it. It was the sheet on which at Guthrie's bidding he had demonstrated his skill at imitating signatures that day he was hired. He remembered that there had been a second sheet on which he had written Guthrie's name once without a model. That second sheet was not in evidence.

"Now Worden and I both saw you practising my name, and we secured this sheet as evidence," Guthrie went on. "After all, you are an amateur forger, and there are certain minute earmarks on each

of these signatures that distinguish them from my true signature, though an amateur wouldn't notice them. I had to take them to a handwriting expert who is in my confidence to have them pointed out. But they agree exactly with the signature on this check and the same earmarks appear in your own natural handwriting. You see, it's a pretty tight case."

Bradwell's coolness had returned now and he was thinking rapidly. He had noticed that the practise sheet in Guthrie's hand was of the same color and texture as the checks used by the firm. The second and missing sheet was of the same stock. What was more simple than to take that second sheet to a printer and have a check-blank printed on it so that the signature already there would lie in exactly the right place?

"All right," Bradwell admitted at last. "You've trapped me. You and I still know that I didn't knowingly forge that check. We both know that this is a dirty, contemptible trick pulled for the purpose of putting me in your power. When I first discovered that you were a crook, Guthrie, I still thought you were a good sport. I find instead that you are simply an artistic thug. What's the answer? Now you've got me, what are you going to do with me?"

"Now we can talk business, I think," Guthrie replied without a trace of resentment at Bradwell's denunciation. "Don't blame you for being sore just now. You'll get over it. I'll ignore your strong language, seeing it's you. It isn't recorded that the kettle became irritated on that historic occasion when the pot called it black.

"Now I don't want to have you arrested. You are too useful to us. I simply want you to realize that you can't afford any fancy scruples such as you showed this morning when you refused to sign the Peterson affidavit. When you understand our practise better you'll see things in a different light, and be glad to work with us. I'm prepared to give you a good raise now and when Worden steps into a partnership with us, as he will next spring, there's his job for you. Later on, if you play the game, there's a partnership for you. With

us you can jump ahead fast. Against us, and—"

Guthrie shrugged his shoulders significantly and left the sentence unfinished.

Bradwell arose. He was perfectly calm by now. Not in vain had he won a reputation at poker in the old Collinsville days. He was ready to admit that his present opponent had a good hand, but was uncertain how far he would back it. He knew, too, that his own cards were not cut of the running, and resolved to bluff it through.

"Now, it's my turn to talk," he announced. "Your proposition has been carefully considered and firmly rejected. When I told you I was going straight I meant it. You can send me to prison again in punishment, if you wish, but if you do, you'll go, too. I haven't been asleep around here. I felt something of this kind coming and I've filed away enough evidence in several different cases to send up the whole gang of you for a long term.

"But I don't care to go to the jug again myself, so if you leave me alone and forget that little check, naturally I'm going to keep my information to myself. So there you are. Now gentlemen, I'm going to turn and walk out that door and out of your lives, unless your officer in the next room stops me. So it's up to you to decide whether the arrest comes off. Good day."

Bradwell turned and walked out of the office. He heard a low, hurried discussion between Guthrie and his clerk as he closed the door, but no officer stopped him.

CHAPTER IX.

HUNTED.

BRADWELL forced himself to walk away from the door of the office building with the utmost deliberation. He could not repress the fear that after a brief consideration, Guthrie would decide he was only bluffing and put his threat of arrest into execution. Yet he had about him enough of boyish bravado to be unwilling to let them see in that case that he felt any fear.

Further, he had the feeling, later justified, that Guthrie would at least detail some one to follow him and watch his movements. It behooved him to keep up his appearance of assurance.

But after a little he became confident that he was not to be the object of a hue and cry, and slipping into a quiet restaurant he ordered a luncheon which he neglected for the most part while he debated with himself as to his future course of action. And it was a bad half hour he put in.

The more he thought over recent events the higher and more insurmountable seemed the stone wall of circumstances built about him. How bravely he had started out to build his life on a new structure of honesty, laid on a foundation of frankness! He had vainly thought that once his original bad record was known and discounted he would draw steadily away from it by putting between it and himself a new record for squareness.

And now, after six months of worse than wasted time, he had succeeded only in adding two more charges of dishonesty, discreditable postscripts to his letter of discredit. It appeared that a continuation of his policy of frankness could get him nowhere but into the poorhouse or prison.

But again his buoyant disposition rose to the emergency. He began to see a faint shimmer of silver around the edge of the cloud. After all, his bluff had worked with Guthrie to the extent of preventing his threatened arrest. The best of it was that it wasn't all bluff. Perhaps, on the other hand, Guthrie's threat had been all bluff. He resolved to push his own bluff a little farther and demand a complete show-down from Guthrie.

He would continue his search for employment and he would use Guthrie as a reference.

"I have a strong hunch," he assured himself, "that the foxy old bird won't dare give me anything but a clean bill of health."

Where to turn next for employment was the question. Should he continue in his dogged determination to get a footing in a law office? Or should he take the advice of that managing clerk he had met

during the first day of his search, who had urged him to try something less exacting as to records? If so, what? What was he at all fitted for outside the law?

That train of thought suggested marine insurance, with which he had gained considerable knowledge during his stay in Guthrie's office. The Great Lakes Marine Insurance Company had headquarters in Buffalo. Guthrie's shipping clients dealt largely with that concern. Bradwell knew they employed a large number of clerks. On the moment he decided to try them out.

A half hour later he was presenting his letter of discredit to the office manager of the insurance company and explaining its purpose.

"They're original, to say the least, Mr. Bradwell," the man decided after reading it. "Not a bad idea of yours, at that. We might possibly give you a try-out if you can show us a clean slate since you began over again. We need a clerk now, as it happens, and you say you know something about our business. Where were you employed last?"

"With the law firm of Guthrie, Sandford and Pierson. You people know them, I think."

"Know them!" the other exclaimed. "You bet we do. So you were with them? Why did you leave?"

"We disagreed over the work they required of me, and I made up my mind I was a little handicapped by my record in trying to follow the law. I am perfectly willing to have you ask them about me. I think they'll testify as to my ability and honesty."

"Nothing doing!" the manager exclaimed. "No. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid there's nothing here for you."

Then he checked himself as though he realized he'd said too much.

"But I shouldn't say that, either," he hastened on, as Bradwell started to rise. "Wait a moment while I speak to the chief about you."

He hurried into an inner office whose door stood near his desk.

Bradwell, a little bewildered and uneasy, stood waiting, but half inclined to leave without further discussion. The manager's manner and expression, even more than

his words, had indicated that Bradwell's former employers were not popular in marine insurance circles. Were they beginning to suspect the dubious practises that Bradwell had resented?

Just then the door of the inner office, into which the manager had gone, opened a crack.

"Hang on to him by all means," came a voice from within. "He might make a valuable witness. May have just the evidence we lack."

Bradwell heard and acted almost automatically. His surmise was correct. The last thing he could afford to have happen just now was to be called as a witness against Guthrie and his crowd. The outer door lay directly in front of him. In a half dozen steps he had reached it and a moment later was in the elevator.

"Foolish to be beating it like this, perhaps," he thought as he reached the street. "They couldn't make me stick around any longer than I wished, unless they had a subpoena all ready. I might have got the lay of things if I'd waited a bit. At that, perhaps it's safest to be very absent."

Just at this moment he happened to glance across the street in time to see a stocky figure slip out of sight through a saloon door. He recognized a private detective he had seen occasionally in Guthrie's office."

"Shadowed, eh?" Bradwell exclaimed. "They seem to be after me going and coming and returing back. These guys up-stairs may have a process-server after me any minute. And my late boss is so anxious about he he's hiring a plug-ugly to watch my moves. Now he'll know I've been to the Great Lakes people and think I'm going to squeal. So next thing will be to beat me to it by pulling that fake arrest. Here's where I evaporate! Nothing doing on railroads, though! They'd watch those. I'll lie low a few days till they relax."

By a devious route, he satisfied himself he'd thrown off his shadow, then in a little café he sat over a succession of cups of coffee until dark. Then he sought out a cheap boarding-house section and an hour later had secured a room.

Here for several days he kept in retirement, going out for exercise only in the evening. He watched the papers, but saw no mention of the Great Lakes Company, or of Guthrie, Sandford and Pierson.

One evening he was returning late to his room, when he became conscious of a dim figure across the dark street that seemed to keep pace with him. He walked faster. So did the shadow. He slowed up. So did the other. He turned off his route and around several corners. The shadow was no longer in sight.

"Guess my nerves played me a trick," he thought. Then he sought a street sign to see where he was. In his preoccupation with his supposed pursuer he had lost himself for the moment in the warehouse section down near the wharves, black and deserted at night.

He had just discovered the name of a street he recognized and turned down it, when he heard a rush behind him. He whirled and dodged instinctively as a heavy figure hurled itself upon him. A stinging blow from a blackjack numbed his left arm. It had presumably been meant for his head.

With his good arm, Bradwell dealt the fellow a punch that sent him staggering back into range of the dull gleam of a street lamp.

A momentary glimpse of the man's face revealed the private detective Guthrie had sent to shadow him.

Instead of returning to the attack the fellow turned and walked rapidly around the corner just as a policeman hurried up from the other direction.

Bradwell in a fury, not noticing the officer, was starting after his fleeing foe when he felt himself seized by the collar, and the voice of the law announced triumphantly:

"I've got ye, ye thug! Just come along peaceful!"

"Get that man!" Bradwell exclaimed. "He tried to blackjack me me."

"G'wan with that stuff! I seen ye smash him. I'm thinkin' yer the guy we've had the tip to look out for. It's the station-house fer yours an' no more argumen unless ye want me to wind me club round yer bean."

The prisoner saw that discretion was practically the whole of valor in this case, and allowed himself to be led away.

"I catch this guy doin' the strong-arm stuff," asserted his captor to the lieutenant at the desk, "an' if I ain't mistaken he answers the description of the ex-con we got the warnin' for last week."

The lieutenant drew a paper from a drawer of the desk, glanced it over, and then looked at Bradwell closely.

"What's yer name?" he demanded.

"George Bradwell," answered the prisoner promptly.

"So! And yer not ashamed of it! Well, we got yer record, me boy. Yer an' ex-con, and under suspicion of bein' up to yer old tricks. But I guess we got ye now in a new one, not quite so artistic as fergin' checks."

At that a new understanding of Guthrie's subtlety dawned on Bradwell. His wily foe was not making the mistake of appearing against him in court on a definite charge, thus forcing Bradwell to retaliate. He had, instead, reported his record, real and false, to the police, thus discrediting him and any future testimony he might offer, and at the same time attempting to hound him out of town, in case his hired thug did not succeed in knocking him out.

He was haled into the magistrate's court after a wretched night in a dirty cell. His trial was brief and most unsatisfactory. The judge was visibly impressed by his appearance, but his story, lacking some links which he did not dare supply, was unconvincing, particularly in view of the garbled record supplied the police. But, as he expected, the man he was accused of attacking did not appear against him.

"I shall have to dismiss this particular charge against this prisoner," the magistrate ruled, "inasmuch as the chief witness cannot be found, and the officer's fleeting glimpse of the attack is not conclusive evidence. In view of his record, however, and the probabilities in the present case, and his confession that he has no visible means of support, I am convinced that he constitutes a public menace. I therefore direct that the charge be changed to vagrancy, of which I find him

guilty. Young man, I'm going to try to save the city the expense of supporting you, however. I will suspend sentence on condition that you leave the city within twenty-four hours. If you're found here after that you'll go up for the limit."

Dazed and helplessly enraged, with another conviction added to his record, Bradwell left the court-room.

As he stepped through the door a weather-beaten, middle-aged man, who had followed him out, stepped up to him.

"Hey, bo, want a job?" said the man. "I'm mate of the steam schooner, Alfred Eagan, Buffalo to Duluth. I'm after some deck-hands. Maybe you'd like a lake trip."

"You're on!" Bradwell exclaimed. "Lead me to your old tub. Anything to get out of this cursed city."

CHAPTER X.

AT LAST A FRIEND.

ONE year later a young tramp slipped off a blind baggage at the edge of a drowsy little railroad yard, and, clambering up the side of a cut and over a high board fence, found himself in the midst of a still drowsier village. "Eden" was the name on the weather-beaten station, and Bradwell, as he breathed in the fresh peacefulness of the scene, thought it most appropriate.

Cool maple rows, hedged lawns, white clapboards and green blinds invited the wanderer to rest. Instead he stepped forward briskly.

A little way down the street a village gossip, in gingham uniform with head towel-bound, was exchanging neighborhood news with another of the sorority across the line fence. An upturned broom emphasized her remarks, semaphore fashion.

"There goes another of Judge Thurston's tramps," she commented as the wanderer came in sight. "It ain't right for him to be taking in all the worthless trash that comes along, the way he does. One of 'em will commit a crime in town some day, you mark my word, Mary Jane. I told Mrs. Thurston so once."

But the tramp did not hear, or hearing, paid no heed.

A few steps brought him to the main street. A grizzled old mail carrier hobbled past with the attenuated leather sack he had just received from the train. In front of one of the town's two general stores, a despondent, open-ribbed and buckboard-hampered sorrel was conducting a losing antily campaign. On the steps of the other emporium a retired citizen was acting as dry nurse to a senile corn-cob pipe. There was no other evidence of municipal activity.

But the tramp had his eye on the white cottage on the hill a half mile up the dusty street. As he approached it, Judge Thurston, toiling in his garden, stood upright to mop away the sweat of his brow with which he earned no small portion of his daily bread.

The tramp quickly appraised the kindly old face and decided he had made no mistake. Only the older residents of Eden remembered when Judge Thurston had settled in the little hamlet and began the pettifogging practise of such law as met the needs of this remote country-side. For almost as many years he had been the township's justice of the peace. His wise and whimsical decisions were as proverbial as his reputation for wisdom in the law. Many were the tales of how "smart city lawyers" up at the county seat had tried in vain to upset the decisions of Eden's justice of the peace, in cases that he had held for the county court.

Why a man of his talents had ever settled in Eden was one of the village mysteries. There was a tradition, never verified by the judge himself, that he had once been a city lawyer.

All this the tramp had learned from fellow-hobos while he was yet many miles from Eden.

"This is Judge Thurston, is it not?" he inquired.

The effect was that of an invisible ventriloquist placing cultured and courteous tones in the mouth of a mat-bearded, cinder-grimed and tattered manikin, from which one should appropriately expect the guttural lingo of the road. Here was a

new variety of suppliant. Nor, indeed, was there any of the air of doglike petition about this specimen.

"Yes," the judge admitted. "What can I do for you?"

"Something different," was the answer. "I've been tramping for a time, but I'm not a tramp by nature, no blowed-in-the-glass stuff. I was sent here by one of your former clients, a real hobo, who rode a freight into the next town with me. He told me you have never turned down a bum, so I came here for one last trial of an experiment I'm making. Read this letter please."

From an inner pocket he drew a soiled and worn envelope. The letter he produced from it showed signs of much handling.

With mild curiosity the judge read it through once, then again with feverish attention.

"Are you the Bradwell mentioned in this letter?" he asked.

"I was. I need a heap of restoration now, though, before the critics could positively identify me as even a copy of the original."

"But why do you give me such a letter? Why did you have it written in the first place?"

"Don't you see?" the young man demanded, the fleeting glimpse of the old whimsicality replaced instantly by intense seriousness. "Suppose I had come to you under an assumed name and told you some story of my past life that would have satisfied you. I might make good and become highly respected in this community. A year, two years, maybe more, might pass smoothly. But think of my state of mind in the mean while? Put yourself in my place.

"Imagine being haunted day by day and month by month with the specter of the old, true story that you felt sure would one day find you out. Think of shuddering every time the train whistled for the station, and breathlessly scanning the faces of all strangers, dreading the sight of one who had known your past. Think of studying the countenances of your neighbors whenever you met them, fearing to read there the dread knowledge.

"Terror would lurk in every mail-bag that came to town. You would never look into the eyes of your new friends without the guilty knowledge that you were deceiving them. Would you be happy? No! Nor I! I'd rather be an acknowledged outcast, as God knows I have been for a year.

"That's why I had that letter written. I was still something of an idealist then. I believed there were men, communities of them, who would give a man a fair show if they knew he was trying to be on the square and hiding nothing.

"I think I trusted a little, too, to the sporting instinct of most men. I thought they'd recognize a gamble on human charity and have curiosity enough to give me a fair run for my money. Why, even the honest, vindictive, old dry-as-dust who wrote that letter had some of it.

"But I haven't found either charity or good sportsmanship of the sort I needed yet. And, believe me, I've had a life while I've been looking for it."

"Come up on the porch, my boy, and tell me about it," invited the judge. "It's about my hour for a drink of buttermilk. Do you ever take it?"

Bradwell acknowledged gratefully that he did, and over a creamy glass of it, fresh from the churn, told the story with which the reader is already familiar excepting that, as he explained to his listener, he thought wise to withhold the name of the lawyers who had threatened his arrest and against whom he had evidence he was not prepared to take into court.

When he came to the point where he fled from Buffalo as deck-hand on the steam-schooner, he hesitated.

"I think I had better not tell the story of that voyage, not now, anyhow," he went on. "In the first place, you might not believe it, and I wouldn't blame you. It sounds too bad to be true. In the second place it involves grave charges against powerful people, charges to prove which there is nothing but my unsupported word. You might blame me, too, for not going at once to the police with my story.

"The ship went down, and I came near going with it. No thanks to my shipmates

that I didn't. I landed in a Chicago hospital with pneumonia, and was near death for weeks. I came out a wreck and I haven't recovered my grip since. I sank to the level of a tramp, as you see me, but I've kept honest. If you'll help me onto my feet, some day when I have some standing again I'll go back and fight those skunks. I'll put them in prison even if I run the risk of going there myself.

"Meanwhile I'm an ex-convict and a tramp. I'm likely at any time to be found by that bunch and sent back to prison on a false charge. So, if you help me, you help me at your own risk. I've warned you."

The eyes of Judge Thurston were moist as his caller finished.

"My poor, unfortunate fellow!" he exclaimed huskily. "Of course, I'll help you. I believe you came to me at just the right moment. The first man I ever knew to take a step like this! The right step!"

"Bully for you!" exploded Bradwell, more heartily than he had spoken before in months. "That is—I mean, thank you! First I'd like a change of clothes and a good scrubbing, then a little money for a haircut and a shave, then a job. If you can do all that for me and give me a berth under your roof till I can earn a little money, I'll pay you back in full. It's understood, of course, that you are to tell the people the whole story about me right at the start. I wish you'd show this letter to as many of them as possible, so there'll be no chance for gossip and rumor to put on any fancy touches. What do you think? Will the Christian charity of this community stand the strain?"

There was a momentary look almost of terror in the old man's kindly eyes.

"The people here are only human. I suppose they gossip some," he hesitated. "But I flatter myself, I have considerable influence over them, and I think they will support me in this. Let me warn you of one thing, though. Some men who've turned over a new leaf deceive themselves by a false humility into something like pride in their past. I don't think you are that kind, but I think it wise to say that I will help you on condition that you

promise me never again to mention your past to any one here. It would embarrass these good people, and they would not like it. I think you can depend also on the'r never embarrassing you by referring to it."

CHAPTER XI.

A YEAR IN EDEN.

FOR a week, Bradwell remained at the little cottage on the hill as the guest of the judge and his gentle wife. The latter seemed to take him for granted as an honored guest. Never by word or look did she hint at her knowledge of his past. Nor did the judge ever again refer to it in any way. The young man at once found himself greatly attached to these good people.

But often as the two men sat talking of many things connected with the outer world with which, for a back-country lawyer, the older man seemed unusually well informed, the other would note again the troubled look in his new friend's face. Was the judge in doubt, after all, as to the wisdom of thus harboring a dubious character?

In the demeanor of the citizens of the village of Eden, however, try as he might to surprise them off their guard, Bradwell could discern no more than the ordinary curiosity over the stranger within the gates.

A few days later the judge secured employment for Bradwell at Deacon Ward's store. At the same time he found him a boarding-place with an aged widow at the other end of the village.

"I'd like to keep you with us," he apologized, "but my daughter Agnes is coming home to spend the rest of her college vacation. We've only the one spare room."

A placid fortnight passed. Eden quickly adopted him as a fixed institution. Bradwell had reached the point where he could fill a sugar order without first making a false pass at the nail-bin, and had assumed the air of one who had been in the general store business all his life. Then suddenly his tranquil, gray horizon trembled and broke into brilliant, auroral hues.

One morning a light step aroused him from a professional study of the labels on the canned goods shelf. He turned, and looked squarely into a pair of brown eyes. They were the kind which express at the same time infinite innocence, ineffable sweetness, and keen intelligence, and all those subtle qualities instantly smote Bradwell's consciousness to the quick.

The eyes shone at him from a physical altitude of not more than five feet four inches. Their spiritual range overtopped Parnassus. They were surrounded by a collection of soft, dark hair, clear, sun-kissed complexion, a slightly tilted nose, and a mouth bounded at the corners by two humorous dimples. Some kind of white frock or other made a misty addition to the picture. The ensemble represented not over twenty years of ripening.

An impatient drumming of fingers on the counter roused the clerk.

"Please send a half a pound of Oolong tea over to Judge Thurston's," sang a celestial flute from the Parnassian summit, and the vision vanished.

"So that's the old chap's daughter!" gasped the dazed young man. And for the rest of that day the development of our rising merchant showed signs of blight that gave a distinct setback to the rapidly growing confidence of his employer.

Agnes regularly attended to the family marketing. Each day he was destined to look into the brown eyes and exchange brief business converse with their owner. He was relieved to find in her none of the usual village informality that would have led her to claim his acquaintance on her father's account.

"Perhaps it's because she despises me," he thought in moments of depression.

Ever since his withdrawal from the Thurstons' home they had been inviting him to Sunday dinner. These occasions had been pleasant breaks in the routine of satisfying the trade. But now, with the coming of the third member of the family and the accompanying psychic disturbance, he looked forward to the next Sabbath visitation with distinct dread. He half hoped that paternal cautiousness would save him from an invitation.

Nevertheless the following Sunday found him seated at the table opposite Miss Thurston. There was no trace of her market-day formality, no hint of doing good on the Sabbath day, only charming cordiality of just the proper degree.

"Does she really despise me, after all?" wondered poor, bewildered Bradwell. "Well, anyhow, she's a thoroughbred, if Eden did produce her."

Thus, with the gravest misgivings, Bradwell began his acquaintance with Agnes Thurston. He never saw her excepting at the store or in the presence of her parents. Never on the part of either mother or daughter did he note a word or look of condescension, any suggestion that their friendliness was purely philanthropic in motive.

But in exact proportion to the growth of their good fellowship, did the kindness of the husband and father become constrained and forced. It was increasingly apparent that, of all the village, the man who had first encouraged Bradwell to make Eden the scene of his experiment was finding the fulfilment of its terms the hardest. Pride kept the young man from making any sign that he understood. It would have kept him from the white cottage altogether had not the lure proved too strong.

Thus swiftly passed the bitter-sweet vacation season. The night before her return to college, Bradwell called to bid Miss Thurston a formal farewell, keenly conscious that a dull drab was about to become the prevailing color in Eden. Agnes was alone on the little piazza, and invited him to sit beside her. She was evidently troubled.

"Mr. Bradwell," she hesitated, "I'm going to ask you to do something for me this winter. I must speak quickly before father or mother interrupt. I hope you won't think me queer and forward."

"It's of them I'm thinking," she hurried on. "Father hasn't been like himself this summer. Mother doesn't see, or pretends she doesn't, so that I won't worry. They've always kept worries from me. These good village neighbors of ours wouldn't say a word, either. I'm so worried, I don't want to go back to college and leave them, but

I can't give any good excuse for not going. There isn't anybody here but you I can count on. Would it be too much to ask you to drop me a little line each week and tell me how things are at home? I somehow feel I can depend on your telling me the truth."

Within his tumultuous heart the young man impiously and ungratefully thanked Heaven for his benefactor's indisposition. Outwardly he managed to blunder forth words meant to be reassuring and sympathetic. He promised somewhat extravagantly to write a full account each week or more often, if she wished, provided she'd drop him a line of answer each time, "to make sure his letters reached her." At the moment he had no thought of self-abnegation. In spite of what she knew of him this innocent girl trusted him!

CHAPTER XII.

THE AWAKENING.

THOSE letters through the winter that followed became the motif of Bradwell's life. Long before he met the writer, again he knew for a certainty that he was irrevocably in love. He knew, too, that his scruples had fought a losing battle and that he must, if possible, win her love in turn.

Moreover, though nothing more intimate than a growing camaraderie had entered into their correspondence, something in her face and the tremor of her hand when they greeted each other on her return the following summer, filled him with fearful yet joyful confidence that there was awakening in her the same feeling he had been forced to confess to himself.

He found it easy now to convince himself that he had a right to that love. His self-esteem had been slowly and surely returning to normal. Eden had not merely tolerated him. He found himself actually popular. He had risen steadily in the confidence of his employer.

He resolved to have a frank talk with Judge Thurston first of all. Contriving one evening to find the judge alone in his garden, he plunged into his subject.

For a long time after Bradwell had finished the older man sat silent with his face buried in his hands. The suppliant tactfully forbore from further speech. At length the father raised a pale face.

"Yes," he groaned, "I have feared it. And I had no right to object. But she will never marry you! She will turn from you in horror when she knows the truth! Oh, if I hadn't been a coward!"

"The truth! What do you mean?" Bradwell shouted. "Doesn't she know all the truth there is to know about me?"

"No, my boy," the old man faltered. "I never told her. I confess with shame that I have failed to keep my agreement with you. No one in this village knows your past but myself. I meant to keep my word, but I was afraid. Let me explain. I—"

But the amazed man heard no further. In his astonishment he had leaped to his feet. As the full significance of the speaker's words dawned on him, he fell back limp as though he had received a plexus blow. In an instant the foundations of a year's building were swept from under him, all his renewed hope in life, his belief that he had won rightfully the respect of his fellows, his hard-earned position in the little community.

The judge was talking on almost incoherently, but Bradwell did not heed him. As soon as he could control himself he arose and departed without another word.

Though he was due back at the store for the evening trade, he went instead to his boarding-place and hastily packed his suit-case. Fortunately his landlady was out. He left her a brief note enclosing what he owed her.

Then, torn with emotion, he poured out his soul in a last letter to Agnes Thurston. With it he enclosed the old letter of discredit. He would never need it again.

It was nearly closing time at the store when he presented himself to his astonished employer. He had first asked the errand-boy to deliver his letter to Agnes on his way home. Before she could comprehend its full meaning he would be aboard the late evening train and out of Eden and her life forever.

His confession to Deacon Ward was complete in every detail except that he could not bring himself to divulge the judge's strange breach of faith or his feeling for the judge's daughter. That part of his experience he blurred effectually by the bare statement that something had just occurred to make it necessary to leave town at once, and he wished to confess everything before going.

There was little indication of charitable tenderness in the deacon's face as he listened to this revelation. Amazement passed into steely, righteous anger that uncomfortably reminded Bradwell of his stern old guardian.

"So!" he exclaimed as the confession came to an end. "You are jest one o' Judge Thurston's tramps after all! And I reckon ye took him in good by the recommend he give ye to me. Ye ain't told me, though, why yer leavin' so sudden. I reckon ye ain't told the worst. Confessin' fer the good o' yer soul don't seem likely to me. You fellers don't do that way. No siree. Knew things was comin' out, an' wanted to put yerself in right as possible, I reckon. I got a good mind to turn ye over to the constable. Somebody on yer trail, likely. But I won't, though it's no knowin' if ye ain't been robbin' my cash-drawer. If ye have I'll have ye follered to kingdom come, by cripes!"

But Bradwell waited for no more. At that moment the muffled whistle of the ten o'clock train moaned through the cut and the young man sped for the station. Three minutes later, unobserved by late hangers-on, he swung aboard a car on the side away from the station.

Pressing his face against the window as the train rumbled over the bridge, he caught a glimpse of a light in a tiny window on the hillside. Then blackness.

CHAPTER XIII.

AGNES STANDS THE TEST.

HE was roused from his bitter musings by a light touch on his shoulder. Some one sank into the seat beside him. He turned abruptly and stared aghast into

the pale, tear-stained face of Agnes Thurston.

He tried to speak and failed. The girl found voice first:

"George! Did you think I'd let you go like that? Never! I'm going with you. I don't know where, and I don't care. Don't try to argue me out of it. I don't care what you've been. I know what you are. Your letter came just in time. Father and mother had gone to bed. I managed to slip out unnoticed. Oh, it's awful to leave them so! But—but you are more to me than they are now. I had to choose, and there was no time to think it out."

Hysterical tears checked her words. Oblivious of the two drummers on the back seat, he gathered her in his arms.

It seemed to Bradwell as though they had sped along thus for an eternity, two souls alone in empty space. But at length the harsh shriek of the whistle and the grinding of brakes penetrated to his consciousness, vaguely at first, then with a meaning which brought prompt resolution.

He sprang to his feet.

"Come, dear," he whispered gently. "This is our station."

"Why—why!" she exclaimed in wonder. "This is only Hortonville! I thought you were going a long way off. Why, they'll know us here!"

But he drew her gently along, and she went trustingly, without further question. For a few moments he left her in a dark corner of the waiting-room, while he roused a drowsy liveryman. It was not till they were driving along the cool, starlit country road that she asked him wonderingly where he was taking her.

"Home!" he answered. "Back to little old Eden."

"No"—he hastened to forestall the fear he felt in the sudden tension of her body—"I'm not going to desert you, dear. I'll face the music there now that I know you care so much. I left for your sake, and I'm going back for your sake. I couldn't take you with me now. We must wait a little longer till I find a place where they'll let me stay and make a home for you. I'll have to use that old letter of discredit again, after all. An hour ago I thought I was

doomed to be a vagabond the rest of my life. Now I feel sure that I shall yet succeed."

It was past midnight when they drew up in front of the little white cottage on the hillside overlooking slumbering Eden. Bradwell trusted that no one in the village had witnessed the impulsive flight of Agnes or their return together. He was determined that she should not suffer from the gossiping tongues of the townspeople. He intended to leave her at her door after a word with her father, return the horse and carriage to the livery-stable, and stay away from Eden till he could establish himself and offer Agnes a home.

In response to his rap a light glowed in the little hall, and a moment later the startled face of Judge Thurston appeared in the doorway.

"Why, Agnes!" he exclaimed. "We didn't know you had gone out! Where on earth have you been at this time of night?"

Then he saw Bradwell.

"Why—why—what does this mean?" he stammered.

Agnes threw herself weeping into her father's arms, and in a few broken words explained.

"I want you to understand, sir, that I am not going to intrude," Bradwell added when she had finished. "I have already told you how I feel toward Agnes. I am very happy and very proud that she feels the same way toward me. But I'm going away now, and unless I can make good somewhere I will never hold her to what she has said to-night."

"Papa, don't you let him go!" Agnes exclaimed. "If you do, I'll go with him, whether he wants me to or not," she added.

"My poor children, come in and let's talk this over a little," soothed the judge.

Mrs. Thurston had joined them by now, and her husband, in a quiet aside, explained the situation.

"George," he added, turning to Bradwell, "I appreciate the way you've acted in this. I know now I have been justified in trusting you as I have this last year. If my little girl cares for you as she does, we must find a way to get you started right."

"I confess I worried and blamed myself a great deal since I first noticed you two were becoming interested in each other; but I didn't feel I could consistently interfere. I decided to trust to my little girl's instincts. I felt sure that if your character didn't ring true she would discover it before it was too late.

"You blame me very much, I know, for letting you live here for a year in a fool's paradise, thinking that I had kept my promise to make your story known to the village. I intended to keep that promise when I made it, but not quite literally, not as soon as I led you to believe I would. I took those liberties with my conscience because I believed that was the only way I could help you.

"My experience in life has led me to believe that the course of frankness you have pursued is the only sure foundation for making a fresh start. But I haven't the optimism of youth that gave you the courage to try it. I knew that you would have a long, up-hill, almost hopeless fight in finding a place where they would let you build on that foundation.

"I knew particularly this little town from their attitude toward other unfortunates I have tried to help. I knew they'd condemn you without further hearing the moment your letter was made public.

"So I meant to wait and let you establish yourself a little. Then I hoped to place you in the office of a legal friend of mine at the county seat, who, I thought, would accept your story. First, I planned to tell your history to a select few here who would be additional references in the county seat. Meanwhile, by corresponding with Collinsville and Buffalo, I had verified your story.

"But the confidants I had selected did not meet the test when I sounded them tentatively with a hypothetical case. They were narrower than I had thought. And the growing friendship between you and Agnes completed the dilemma that nearly gave me nervous prostration. I didn't try my plan.

"I didn't dare tell you I had broken faith with you. My conscience wouldn't let me get you out of town by exposing you, though when I thought of the danger to my little girl I was tempted.

"You wonder why my sympathy for you was so great? People here have always wondered why I had so much sympathy for the unfortunate, just as they've wondered why I ever settled in Eden.

"I'm going to tell you a story Agnes has never heard before. It will do you both good. Her mother heard it before she married me.

"I began my practise of law as a young man in Chicago with every prospect of a successful and prosperous career. I reached the point where my next step forward seemed to depend on my getting a considerable sum in ready cash in order to establish myself properly. I didn't have it. I couldn't get it. Then came my great temptation.

"I don't need to go into details, but the opportunity was afforded for me to misappropriate the sum I needed with practically no chance of discovery before I could replace it.

"Before I stopped to think it out carefully I made certain moves that I suddenly discovered had left a record that I could never explain if it was discovered, and it was likely to be discovered at any time. Then I woke up to what I was about. I never took that money. I was never technically guilty. But I lived in constant dread that my guilty impulse would be discovered. I wanted to confess and start right again, but I didn't dare. I wasn't very strong physically, and my health gave way under the strain.

"About that time I inherited a little money, and decided to go away for a year and recuperate. I came here. Here I met and married Agnes's mother. Finally I decided to stay here. My criminal impulse was never discovered. The man who might have discovered it died soon after I left Chicago.

"I've never been tempted that way since. But in every unfortunate who has come my way I've seen what I might have been. You, George, took, under much more trying circumstances, the course of frankness I ought to have taken. So you see why you interested me so and why I wanted to make no mistake in trying to help you."

Agnes crossed the room with a little cry

of sympathy, sank in her father's lap, and threw her arms about his neck. Bradwell's emotions would not suffer him to speak.

"Now I have another plan for getting you on your feet," the judge resumed after a moment, "and I want you to trust me and stay here till I've tried it. I can't tell you about it till I have tried it."

"But do you realize," Bradwell protested, "that my enemies may be still on my trail? Now that my record is known here after I've apparently been in hiding so long, a detective may follow me, and you'll be held up to ridicule by the whole village."

"Now, my boy," the judge interposed, "just trust me. Stay here in my house and keep out of sight for a few days till I see what can be done. Will you do as I ask?"

"Please, George," Agnes interceded. "Father never failed to help any one yet who'd let him."

"All right," Bradwell surrendered. "I confess I don't feel right about it, but I'll do as you say."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LETTER CANCELED.

THE day following Bradwell's confession and flight was one of intense excitement in Eden. Deacon Ward had retailed Bradwell's story, with hysterical trimmings, to some belated loungers almost before the exile had boarded his train. Telephones had been busy till well into the small hours.

By morning it was understood that the fugitive, after a long term in prison for a series of variegated crimes, had recently looted a bank of some hundred thousand dollars and had been tracked to Eden by the officers. It was even maintained by some that he had held Deacon Ward up at the point of a gun and robbed the cash-drawer before his mysterious disappearance. His whereabouts caused wild and diversified speculation.

Much of this Judge Thurston learned directly when he went down-town that day. His report to Bradwell on the state of the village sentiment confirmed the wisdom of

his advice to his guest to keep out of sight for the time being.

This he did so conscientiously that his presence in the little white cottage was not suspected, though several neighbors called during the day, each bursting with ill-concealed curiosity to learn how the Bradwell dénouement had affected his sponsors.

Thus three days passed. Bradwell was seething with impatience to know what plan his friend the judge was working out in his behalf. Meanwhile, there was little evidence of activity on the old gentleman's part. He had the air of a man waiting for something over which he had no control. To Bradwell's surprise and growing bewilderment, his friend seemed more cheerful and contented than he had appeared before at any time since the younger man's first arrival in Eden.

He spent much of his time with Agnes, but, strangely enough, they talked but little. Their minds were full of forebodings that each dreaded to discuss with the other. It was evident that the girl was upset.

Toward evening of the third day Bradwell was alone in the little back parlor where he spent most of his time, this being the safest retreat from unexpected callers. Agnes had gone out on an errand. The judge had just come in and gone to his room.

There was a heavy step on the front stoop and a sharp rap at the door. He heard Mrs. Thurston go to the door and usher in a caller. A moment later she rapped gently at the parlor door, opened it, and came in, closing the door behind her. He saw that she was troubled.

"There's a man in the sitting-room who asks to see you," she explained. "He's a stranger. I never saw him before, and don't know who he is. He seems to know you are here, so I suppose you'll have to see him."

"I suppose I will," Bradwell agreed dully. He had a conviction that the caller represented the long-expected blow of his enemies. He half-expected, when he opened the sitting-room door, to confront the same thick-necked, brutal private detective whom Guthrie had put on his trail.

He was confronted instead by a man of much higher type, a man with the appearance of a gentleman, but a very determined and aggressive gentleman. Bradwell tried in vain to remember ever having seen him around the office of Guthrie, Sandford and Pierson.

The stranger studied his face intently for a full minute before he spoke. Then, sharply:

"You are George Bradwell?"

"Yes."

"I've come to take you back to Buffalo."

Bradwell had expected it. He had steeled himself to meet the inevitable. Yet, coming when it did, just as supreme happiness had seemed momentarily within his grasp, it filled him with blind, uncontrollable rage at the injustice of it. Judge Thurston came into the room at that moment, but Bradley scarcely noticed him. He burst out in a torrent of protest:

"So your people are ready to push that fake-check case at last! Have they forgotten that I promised them that if they sent me to prison they'd go, too? Did they think that by now they had covered their tracks so well that I couldn't prove anything against them?"

"If so, why are they after me? Why can't they call it quits? But they've done some good covering if they think they can stand bringing my story into court. I've got better evidence against them than I had when I made that promise to Guthrie two years ago.

"It must be the gang they sent me out with on that schooner from Buffalo. Didn't they tell them I got onto their whole plot; that I learned the schooner belonged to one of Guthrie's clients, and which one it was; that I discovered the cargo was a fake cargo; that the old tub was scuttled in Lake Michigan to get the insurance money; and that they locked me in my cabin, so I'd go down with it and tell no tales, and that in doing so they acted under orders from my friend Guthrie?"

Bradwell paused. He had noted that his listener became acutely interested when he mentioned his mysterious trip on the lake schooner and showed distinct signs of as-

tonishment as he proceeded. Evidently that fact had told.

"This is amazingly interesting, Mr. Bradwell!" the stranger exclaimed. "We didn't know of this. In fact, we didn't know whether you were dead or alive till Judge Thurston sent for us the other day."

Judge Thurston had betrayed him! It was a blow that left him fairly faint for a moment. It seemed unbelievable that the father of Agnes could have used such a method of separating her from him. He turned to the judge, his hateful question in his eyes.

A look of pain swept over the old man's face, and he made no denial.

But the stranger was speaking again. At first Bradwell scarcely heard him. Then a phrase caught and held his attention once more.

"So you see, Mr. Bradwell, you had me on the wrong side of the fence. I am not representing Guthrie, Sandford and Pierson. I am Mr. Yates, one of the vice-presidents of the Great Lakes Marine Insurance Company. You happened into our office looking for a job, you remember, about two years ago, when we were first getting suspicious of Guthrie and his crowd.

"Our chief at once saw in you a possible witness, but when he sent out for you, you had vanished. We made up our minds you had some guilty knowledge, and had overheard something that made you suspicious. We've been wanting you ever since. Three months ago we began to get definite clues against Guthrie and the rest. Then a letter from the judge here disclosed your whereabouts and gave us some information about you that made you so important to us that I was sent out here myself to see you.

"The judge thought he was helping you reinstate yourself by making inquiries of us. It remains to be seen whether it will have that effect on you. But what you have told me about your voyage on the ill-fated schooner doubles your value to us tenfold."

Bradwell underwent a swift convulsion of feeling. The judge had been true after all. But the changed status of his caller left him in no less peril.

"I see I have made a mistake," he said. "It doesn't matter much, though, whether you send me up for complicity with Guthrie or Guthrie takes his revenge by sending me up on his false-check charge. However, I'm glad it has come to an issue. I meant to bring it myself some day when I was on my feet again so I could claim some standing in court. But it might as well come now. I'm caught in a hopeless trap, I'm afraid."

There was a momentary expression of pity in the insurance man's face.

"We know all about that charge of forgery that Guthrie is holding over you," he went on. "I'm sorry for you, Bradwell. Suppose I decide we can get along without you. As a matter of fact, I have no subpoena or warrant of arrest for you. Would you like to disappear quietly and have it appear you skipped out before I got here?"

Bradwell looked up quickly. For a moment he hesitated while he studied his questioner's face. But he got no help there nor in the face of the judge, to whom he turned. But in the next instant his resolution was formed.

"No!" he declared emphatically. "I'll go back with you and face the music. I'm going to set myself right again as far as I can, if I have to spend ten years in prison."

"Good for you!" shouted Yates.

"Just what I thought you'd say," declared the judge, slapping him on the back.

"Mr. Bradwell," Yates considered, "we have been testing you out, and you ring true. You are the key to the unraveling of one of the biggest conspiracies against the marine insurance companies in the history of Great Lakes shipping. You can be of more use to us as one of us than as prisoner under suspicion, or even as a coerced witness. We wanted to find out first, though, whether you had the right spirit. Consider yourself on our pay-roll till Guthrie and the rest are where they belong."

"Now, as for that forged check, set your mind at rest. One of our detectives has got next to an underling in Guthrie's office. He tipped us off that you knew something damaging, but that Guthrie had

an ax over your head. A little prying unearthed the printer who made up that fake check."

Bradwell sank into a chair, so overcome by sudden relief that he was unable to speak.

A year later one of the leading gossips of Eden Village was idly waiting while Deacon Ward did up a package of sugar.

"Ever hear what became o' that young crook, Bradwell, you used to have here, deacon?" she asked.

"Nope! An' I don't care. He better not show up here again. He'll git tarred an' feathered."

"I'm kinda sorry for poor Judge Thurston an' his wife. Reckon they never got over his runnin' off with their girl. That's what comes of sendin' girls to college."

"That's what comes o' bein' soft over good-fer-nothin' scamps, tramps an' such. Jail's where they belong."

"Yes. The judge was too soft, I always said. Funny what become of him an' Mrs. Thurston. Ain't heard where they went?"

"Nope!"

About the same time another gossip, this one a Collinsville character, met old Amos Warren on the streets of that village.

"Ain't ever heard anything of what become of George Bradwell, hev ye, Amos?"

"No! Never expect to. Probably back in prison."

"I don't expect you'll ever see that ten thousand dollars he took."

"It wasn't ten thousand dollars—it was one thousand dollars! Don't make it worse 'n it was! I'll never see it again, of course. That kind don't ever reform. I know 'em."

And about the same time Judge and Mrs. Thurston were sitting in the sunset on the porch of a little ivy-clad bungalow in a Buffalo suburb. Near them sat Mrs. George Bradwell, a little plumper, but if anything a little prettier than Agnes Thurston, of Eden. All three had their attention glued on a tiny bassinet in which George Bradwell, Jr., lay prone on his back, engaged in the bewitching process of inserting a set of pink toes in a pink mouth.

A step on the walk broke the spell. The next moment a radiant-faced, confident young man held Mrs. George Bradwell in his arms.

"Tell me quick, George!" she whispered tenderly. "I know it's good news you have to impart."

"It is, venerable old mother person. It has come all in a bunch. The Court of Appeals has confirmed the conviction of Guthrie and his crowd. I have in my pocket a paper proving that I'm once more a citizen of these United States, and also a duly accredited practising lawyer in New York State. I am also in receipt of notice that I am henceforth a permanent member of the legal staff of the Great Lakes Company at twice my former stipend; and last, but not least, I've just mailed a check for one thousand dollars to old Uncle Amos Warren, devil take him and God bless him!"

A smothered squeal of delight was his

(The End.)

answer; then, after a few minutes in which the judge and his wife took part in the good news, Agnes exclaimed:

"I'm going right in and write a long letter to Aunt Hetty. She's the biggest gossip in Eden. That 'll square us there, and we can really begin to live now."

A little later Bradwell strolled around the corner of the house to the garden, where a bent and grizzled old figure had just finished his day's work and was cleaning off his hoe.

"Good evening, Bruiser!" Bradwell shouted. "How goes the new job?"

"Fine, sir—fine! Beats the old bench in Auburn forty ways. Say, son! I was the guy that was nutty when I said they was nothin' to that startin'-over stuff. Believe me, you had the right dope! I'm gettin' too old for the strong-arm game, anyhow; but, believe me, I kin use the black-jack on ragweed, an' quack grass for ten years yet."



I.

AS the train speeds through that up-State stretch of country which lies just this side the Canadian border, you may get a fleeting glimpse of a sizable, thriving settlement which the station sign

informs you is Beachville. From the car windows you see nothing to differentiate it from the other "villes" of the section.

A group of brick buildings of a dull-red ugliness, some half-dozen aspiring chimneys, a well-stocked wood-yard, the usual line of workers' cottages, running parallel

to a brawling stream—this is all the confused blur reveals before being shut from view behind the river curve. Merely an industrial dot on an otherwise monotonous expanse of farming land.

No, the stranger would hardly sense the unusual in Beachville—would see no reason to induce him to stop over a train or two. The very name of the place argues against interesting—much less, excitable—history. Which only goes to show that comedy, tragedy, and other human dramas have no need of elaborate stage equipment. For should the stranger take the off chance in the hope of unearthing some worth-while bit of local tradition, not many minutes would pass before whispers of a strange tale would reach his ears.

The gossip would all center about a certain day some five years back, the Day of the Red Curse, as it is commonly called. The version of the urchin in the street would be accompanied by winks and sly laughter, the story of young Beach himself, owner of the plant, would be marked with a soberer, more thoughtful emphasis, but should you have the good fortune to wring it from the reticent lips of Amy, his wife, you would not fail to note a haunted look of fear, a shadow of dread in the soft depths of her fawnlike eyes.

Five full years of happiness, comfort, and prosperity have not been sufficient to entirely wipe out the memory of that century-old day when love, the future, all that she held dear, hung in the balance. Not for a single night since then has she failed to breathe a little prayer of gratitude that in the battle between herself and the forces of evil, her woman's wit came to the rescue—and won.

Amy Beach came to Beachville a bride. The village was not called Beachville then. An indifferent population offered no objection to losing its identity in that of the larger town of Winwood some three miles distant. So, as far back as the oldest resident could remember, the place had been known by no more specific name than "the river village."

Amy knew that Neil Beach would change all that—and much else besides. With the confiding trust of a newly married and hap-

py woman, she firmly believed that her athletic giant of a husband, with his Yankee heritage of square jaw, clear eye, and unbounded faith in himself could conquer far bigger worlds than this near-Canadian outpost, had he the inclination—and money.

Lack of suitable social connections failed to disturb the loyal little woman in the least. "On the other hand, Neil," she often confided, "I'm mighty glad I'm *not* expected to play the social game. The wife of a rising industrial magnate—"

"Ahem! That's me, I suppose?" humorously broke in her husband.

"Don't interrupt for applause," severely went on Amy. "As I started to say, where would I fit in a community given over to formal calls, five o'clock teas and bridge? I intend to be a real side partner, Neil—no useless clinging vine. Every right-minded woman should know her husband's business from A to Z, should comprehend its details, and be able to grapple with its problems intelligently."

It may be mentioned, in parenthesis, that during her last year in college, Amy had imbibed a mild dose of feminism. Love had done the rest. Therefore the place of honor in the shining sections of her new bookcase was given over to Neil's technical books. And these Amy perused by the hour with knitted brow, much to the tender amusement of her lord and master.

"You really don't have to do that, Lady Bluestocking, you know," he reminded her. "Pretty tough traveling for a tenderfoot like yourself, dear."

Amy drew herself up proudly.

"Didn't I say I intended to be your side partner?" she asked. "Well, I meant it. It isn't enough that I know in a vague way the business is going to earn money—I'm going to know *how* it earns it."

Neil pinched Amy's flushed cheek playfully.

"It's a good little pal, anyway," he returned, "and I do appreciate it. Honest to goodness, I do, Henrietta Highbrow."

For a mere second the hint of raillery in Neil's gray eyes was answered by the tiniest flame of resentment in Amy's brown ones.

"You may laugh, Neil," she said soberly,

"but the day may come—mark my words—when you'll be glad that I do know something of your business."

Not many months passed before Neil Beach had occasion to remember the prophecy.

From the front windows of her modest home, draped in snowy net, Amy Beach followed the building of the new factory. No sordid, money-getting venture was it, but a vision beautiful, her trustful affection transforming every ugly brick into so many magic stepping-stones for Neil's upward career.

Often she was on the ground itself, talking with carpenters, consulting masons, and passing opinions with the overseer. Far more wonderful than any military turnout she had ever witnessed, was the daily arrival of truck-loads of logs. The raucous discords of hammers, saws, cranes, and pulleys were as sweet music in her ears. The installation of the immense steel boilers was a red-letter occasion, while the day the tallest chimney was completed, she celebrated by preparing a course dinner with extra side dishes and ice-cream for dessert.

One drawback, and one only, marred the pleasure of those early days of happy achievement. To reach the new plant, Amy, being on the farther side of the river, had to cross a foot bridge and, skirting a gulch a short distance farther on, ascend the opposite slope. The approach to the gulch was always marked by a noticeable quickening of her footsteps. It had been so from the very first of her excursions to her husband's factory.

On that occasion, a dark, shriveled, evil-eyed man had stood in the middle of the road as if with malign intent to block her way. She stopped, hesitating. The evil-eyed one pulled a shabby cap from his shock of coal-black hair and made a mocking bow.

"The grand new lady, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he questioned.

Considering agreement the easiest way of disposing of him, Amy silently nodded.

"Ah, I have right, then. I salute you, *madame*. My people salute you, too, and in saluting you, salute *monsieur*, the husband of *madame* and the so kind patron."

Amy hurriedly took a step or two forward. But further advance was checked by a deprecating wave of the stranger's grimy hand.

"Not so fast, my lady," he objected. "I have something more to say. Is it not that *madame's* husband, with his bricks and pipes and chimneys, will bring money to the pockets of the gentle swine, my neighbors? But, yes, *naturellement*. Why not Canuck Gulch as well? *Monsieur*, in his enriching, will be able to throw a crumb or two to us—*bien sûr!*"

"Really—I can't say—I don't—" floundered Amy helplessly.

The gnomelike creature threw a glance of disdain at her. "Have not fear, *grande dame*," he sneered. "Look below." He swept the gully with an inclusive sweep of his ragged arm.

Obeying, Amy's frightened eyes took in a huddled group of miserable dwellings—half tent, half shack—hugging the sides of the ravine. An unkempt child, playing at mud-pies, and a mangy goat, picking its way across a pile of *débris*, were the only signs of life. Desolation and shiftlessness reigned supreme.

"Not much, you think, lady?" said the other, reading Amy's thoughts. "True. My people have no houses, no lands more. But one thing they remember themselves. It comes far, very far back, when the north was to us." He jerked a thumb in the direction of Canada. "This something in your tongue you call independence. A long word, but a good one. Well, this independence they forget them never and never will—*jamais de la vie! Vous comprenez?*"

Amy nodded automatically.

"*C'est ça!* Listen, you then!"

He took a step nearer. At sight of his doubled fist, Amy retreated. He checked her with a dark scowl.

"My people, I say," he went on, "have never give up independence. We come. We go. We do that which to us pleases. And, my lady"—his voice dropped to a menacing hoarseness—"we take, when it to us necessities. If people give, *bien*. If people give not, we take, *tout de même*. It is well, *madame*, you tell that to *monsieur*. For if he has not of kindness of

heart—*mon Dieu*, it is Canuck Gulch that to him will teach it. I bid you adieu, *madame*."

He stepped aside. Another grotesque salutation and he had squirmed his way downward among the bushes and out of sight as silently and deftly as a snake.

Not a little shaken, Amy hunted up the construction foreman with breathless questions on her lips. Darrell had lived in or near the river village all his life, and if anybody could give her the information she sought, he was the one. For the present she thought it best not to tell Neil of her encounter.

"Canuck Gulch?" Darrell repeated. "Don't tell me ez how they've been in-sultin' ye, Mrs. Beach, or—"

"No, oh, no," Amy reassured him with assumed lightheartedness. Briefly she touched upon her recent experience as if it were nothing more than an amusing incident. "I've only a bit of curiosity as to what or who these gully people are, Mr. Darrell. Please satisfy it."

Darrell leisurely removed his glasses.

"A scurvy lot," was his comment. "An eyesore in the river village, ef e'er there be one. Ye see, they're a 'throw back' from the early decent French-Canadian settlers. Powerful strain of Indian in their make-up, they say. It's this red streak as works the very devil with 'em. Time an' agin we've tried to git rid of 'em, but the squatters won't budge. They'll keep on stickin', I s'pose, ez long ez they know they ben't wanted."

"But tell me," persisted Amy, "what do they do that is so bad? Do they steal or—"

"Steal?" broke in Darrell dryly. "Ye've said it, Mrs. Beach. Why, thievin's their fust, last, an' middle name. Nothin's safe from the mongrels' light fingers. The head o' the gang—the one I take it spoke to ye—is Pierre Chinaux in his own lingo, though gen'ally he goes by the name o' Black Pete. He leads, the rest foller. He supplies the wits, t'others carry out his rascally commands."

"Are there women?" asked Amy.

"So called," was Darrell's unflattering reply. "Ev'ry whit ez bad ez the men.

Take that beady-eyed wife o' Black Pete's, fur instance. She's a reg'lar fury, a genuine vixen."

"But there's always the church with these French-Canadians," went on Amy. "I've heard their priests have the most absolute influence over their parishioners—that only a word will keep them subdued and straight."

"Of the better sort—yes. But not these. Père Laloire—he's the priest in the nearest border settlement—has done his darndest fur 'em, but he ended by throwin' up his hands. Nothin' counts with 'em 'cept one thing."

"And that is—" Amy eagerly questioned. "Superstition."

"What! With lawless men of that stamp?"

"It's allus their kind what is superstitious. It's their very breath. The stars, the clouds, the cards—all these Black Pete keeps tabs on, an' 'less they pass out the right dope, there's nothin' doin'. Omens an' signs are feared a powerful sight more than the sheriff." Darrell shook his head. "Hope Mr. Beach don't hev no trouble wi' the varmint," he concluded. "But ef he don't, he'll be the fust one ez ain't. A scurvy lot, I'm tellin' ye, Mrs. Beach, a scurvy lot."

Amy's heart sank. The possibility of the Canuck Gulch undesirables coming in contact with the Beach works filled her with disquiet. A nameless but unshakable fear spoiled her day—and many days thereafter. Try as she would, she could not wholly remove from her mind the picture of a sullen, squat figure obstructing the road or forget the threatening words: "If people give, *bien*. If people give not, we take, *tout de même*. It is well, *madame*, you tell that to *monsieur*. For, if he has not of kindness of heart—*mon Dieu*, it is Canuck Gulch that to him will teach it."

She had not many days to wait before the taking process, of which Black Pete had boasted, began.

Neil came home to supper one night with a deep frown on his usually humorous face. The forced smile with which he greeted Amy did not deceive her.

"Remember," she cautioned, "I'm the

side partner in this Beach venture and if there are troubles, this member of the firm intends to share them."

Neil silently crossed to the dinner-table. Amy blocked the way.

"No confidence, no eats, dear," she insisted playfully. "Better 'fess up."

"It's really nothing worth getting worked up over, sweetheart," young Beach tried to reassure her. "Just a trifling annoyance, that's all."

"With your men?"

"No—outside."

"Canuck Gulch, then?" Though put in form of a question, womanly intuition supplied the answer before Neil had time to reply.

"Yes—the miserable squatters!" he said. "Great Heavens, do they think I'm made of money, I wonder? You'd think, to hear that Black Pete talk, that my sole purpose in coming to the place was to keep him and his gang supplied with fire-wood. But, by Jove, I've put an end to that!" Neil pushed back his chair in disgust.

Answering Amy's questions, he then went on to explain that the week before, Black Pete and two or three disreputable-looking retainers had put in an appearance at the wood-yard with a wheelbarrow and calmly demanded some logs. Upon being refused, they had grown abusive, then threatening.

"Did you tell them," interrupted Amy, "that it was pretty costly fire-wood they were begging? That the logwood had come a long distance, even from Central America?"

Neil nodded curtly.

"Yes, and got nothing but a string of curious French oaths for my pains," he replied. "But I set my foot down just the same. I answered threat for threat. Told them I wasn't going to be bamboozled out of my rights by any nonsense of theirs, that if they helped themselves, as they declared they would do, I'd see that the law took its course. Their state of mind on leaving was not what you'd call angelic. I expected trouble. Well, I got my expect all right."

"Oh!" Amy couldn't restrain a little cry of alarm. "They haven't tried to lay hands on you, have they, dear?"

"No," answered Neil, grimly adding,

"not yet. But last Monday night they boldly carried away what they wanted. Tuesday night the theft was repeated, and last night they made the biggest haul of all."

"But the night-watchman?"

"Claims it couldn't possibly have been going on while he was on duty. My private opinion is, though, that he didn't care to take chances with the Canucks. One against three or four and those three or four desperate toughs—well, it didn't present an exactly agreeable situation. There was only one thing left for me to do and I've done it."

"Oh, what?" Amy nervously clasped and unclasped her hands in a fever of apprehension.

"Got out a warrant for Black Pete's arrest. He's cooling his heels in jail at this moment. I couldn't swear to the stealing of the others, but I got the goods on him all right. The rascal took the trouble to come around and openly flaunt his theft in my face. Boasted, too, that if I made trouble for him, he'd fix me all right. Well, my gentleman got the only answer possible."

Amy went white. Still she tried to put into words the courage she did not feel.

"You did exactly right, Neil," she agreed, "it was the only thing possible. We cannot go bankrupt for those creatures. So don't you worry, dear. Your side partner isn't going to."

But the side partner did worry, not alone that night, but every succeeding day and night for the entire length of Black Pete's term, which was three months. In fact, she thought of little else.

A bad, revengeful man was behind the bars. He had made threats—vague, it is true, but all the more disquieting on that very account. And the man against whom these threats were directed was Neil—her Neil. How could she help worry?

The 9th of June—the day of Black Pete's release—was a black date in her mental calendar, daily and nightly anticipated with sickening fear.

When it finally arrived, she made one transparent excuse after another to keep her husband at home. Her eyes followed his every movement. She clung to him passionately.

"Why," laughed Neil, "what could that little whippersnapper of a half-breed do to an athletic 'gym' product like 'yours truly'? Besides, side partner," he rallied her, "this isn't bucking up, you know. The good of the firm comes first always."

"I know," said Amy with an effort, "and I'll try to be sensible." A ghost of a smile flickered over her wan face. "But at least you'll let me be your body-guard, won't you?" she asked. "Then if anything happens to you, it'll happen to me, too."

"Sure thing! But don't bother your pretty head, pard, with the thought that anything's going to happen to either of us."

"This noon I shall start early and go up to meet you," insisted Amy. "Don't leave till I get there."

"Orders will be implicitly obeyed, pard," returned Neil with a lingering kiss.

Long after her husband's swinging strides had covered the distance to the bridge and well beyond, Amy stood motionless at the front door. Household duties were forgotten. The slightest sound made her jump in nervous alarm. At length, with an involuntary sigh, she turned her back on the retreating form that had now reached the vicinity of the new office building.

It was the longest morning she had ever known. With a positive sob of relief, she heard the noon-day whistles blow. That meant that Neil would be looking for her within the next hour. One o'clock was his usual quitting time. Suddenly she decided to start for the plant at once, and with the determination, her burden seemed to lift.

What a stupid she had been to get so worked up over nothing! A great member of the firm if, at every turn, she was going to allow feminine fancies to gain control over common sense!

Light-heartedly she dressed. Then, her fears still half banished, she tripped along, down the hill, across the bridge, up the opposite incline toward the gulch, and then—

Her blood suddenly froze in her veins. Her footsteps lagged, then wavered, and only by a supreme effort of will was she able to fight off unconsciousness. As it was, the radiant sunshine of the summer

morning was as if completely blotted out by something black and foul.

The scraggly bushes forming a ragged fringe along the further side of the gully moved mysteriously. Voices, low, rough tones, gruff commands and answers, a foreign curse or two, came to Amy in snatches.

"*Canaille!*"

"*Canaille yourself!*"

"What is it that you have fear for?"

"Strike then. Strike to kill!"

"But the law—"

"*Mille diables!* I snap me my fingers at the law!"

With limbs still trembling, Amy attempted to tiptoe stealthily past the clump of underbrush. All might have been well, but at that moment the bushes parted and a villainous face was thrust through. Seeing Amy, he leered maliciously, then stepped into the open. With a sick little feeling at heart, she saw that his horny hand grasped a heavy bludgeon.

He gave a single subdued whistle—apparently a concerted signal—and a second evil-looking confederate joined him. Amy had no difficulty in recognizing Black Pete. He, too, was armed with a club. Not a syllable was spoken by either man. Her own uncontrollable sharp cry of anguish was summarily checked by a dirty hand laid over her mouth with no very gentle touch.

"Cry, if it to you pleases," hissed Black Pete close to her ear, "but *madame* makes nothing that way."

The next moment Amy found herself almost lifted from her feet. A strong clutch pinching either arm as in a vise, she was half shoved, half dragged along a narrow foot-path, back into the thicket.

Pointed branches, like so many sharp needles, grazed her face as her captors hurried her forward. In the first opening they came upon the remainder of the gang—two crouching, dark-skinned, low-browed specimens like their chief, only plainly lacking his boldness and initiative. With cowed humility they drank in his few curt words of explanation. After which, Black Pete turned to Amy.

"My lady makes us honor," he sarcastically greeted her with a deep bow.

Amy took in the sound of the words, but not their sense. Her arms now released, she looked about for a means of escape. Black Pete intercepted the glance and the design back of it with an evil grin.

"Why should my lady," he asked, "want to leave so good company? And with *monsieur*, *madame's* husband, about to make us a *petite visite*, too! It is best that my lady waits him here."

"You must let me go! This minute, do you understand?" demanded Amy desperately. "You have no right to keep me here like this!"

"No?" mocked Black Pete. "Have of patience, my lady. To show you our good heart, we will take you to my home below"—with a jerk of his disheveled head he indicated the patched roof of the nearest shack a few yards distant—"and there let you wait the coming of *monsieur*. Of course it is no grand house like the house of—"

"Tell me—oh, tell me," interrupted Amy breathlessly, "what I can do, what I can give, to make you listen to me. There is nothing you can ask that I will not gladly hand over. Only say the word—name the sum—"

Black Pete listened to the last syllable of her impassioned plea with scornful calm.

"There is a saying in the French, *madame*," he returned with deliberation, "that is often true. It is, '*Mieux vaut tard que jamais*,' or, in your tongue, 'Better late than never.' But I regret me that this is one of the times there is no 'better' about the lateness—your lateness and *monsieur's*."

"Have you no pity, no mercy?" groaned Amy.

"Mercy? Who speaks of mercy?" scoffed Black Pete. "Had *monsieur* mercy when we of Canuck Gulch asked for but a few sticks of his worthless fire-wood?"

"It was not worthless and it was not fire-wood."

An indifferent Gallic shrug of the shoulders was the only answer Amy's retort called forth.

"*An avant!*" At Black Pete's command, two of his retainers fell into single file ahead of Amy, the remaining pair brought up the rear. The chief himself walked by Amy's side.

"We of the—the committee, do you call it?" he explained as they followed the narrow foot-path, "will wait with you under the shelter of my humble roof. *Monsieur* leaves not till some time. That I know well. We were but practising for *monsieur's* reception a moment ago. It would be a pity if all should not go well at the reception."

Amy suppressed a wild scream only with the utmost effort. The band had by this time reached a short but sharp descent. With Black Pete's aid, awkwardly tendered, Amy slid, rather than walked, to the threshold of his miserable cabin.

It was a cluttered, slovenly interior that met her eye. Odds and ends of poor furniture, mostly of home manufacture, were propped up at indifferent angles. A battered deal-table in the center of the room was minus a leg, while rickety stools appeared in danger of collapsing at any moment. On a miniature rusty range, that plainly had known neither blacking nor brush, sizzled a smelly stew whose chief ingredient appeared to be garlic. A bench supported, in unstable fashion, a tub of sudsy clothes—or rags, rather. Evidently it was wash-day in the domestic schedule of Black Pete's wife.

Emerging from the steaming clouds of moisture, that shrewish, black-eyed woman slowly lolled forward. Her age was perhaps thirty-five or thereabouts. In a savage, coarse fashion, she was not bad looking. Resting calicoed arms, bared from the elbow down, akimbo on her ample hips, she looked Amy over with studied insolence.

"The *grande dame*, eh?" at length she muttered. "Not often do fine folks o' her kind find the trail to Canuck Gulch." Then with a sourly humorous gleam of understanding at the men: "But perhaps one helped her a bit, who knows?"

Her fellow countrymen greeted the sally with chuckles of delight. Even the taciturn face of the black chief relaxed somewhat.

"Paulette has right," he declared. "Very much the right. One helped *madame*." Then to Amy: "But my lady mus' sit while she waits for her so kind husband, *monsieur*."

Amy lunged, rather than sank, into the

nearest apology of a chair. She had almost reached the limit of her endurance. Deafening, insistent noises surged through her brain—their burden the repetition of just two words: "Save—Neil—save—Neil—save—Neil—" To her benumbed senses they were the only two words in her whole vocabulary that had any meaning.

An alarm-clock on the slanting mantel, that looked as if it might have been rescued from some rubbish heap, pointed to the half-hour. Thirty short minutes and then—she shuddered at the prospect. Neil would be on his way home. Failing to meet her, he would naturally assume that something had detained her and would start for lunch.

"Save—Neil—save—Neil—save—Neil!" pounded the maddening refrain with renewed energy. Then things began to turn black, to mix themselves up in whirling confusion. Over the edge of a frightful precipice, Amy felt herself slipping fast, faster, still faster.

When she struck bottom, a vixenish-looking creature stood ready proffering her a very dirty, very cracked cup of water. Amy pushed it away in nauseated disgust. The sudden movement splashed the contents of the cup into the other woman's face. Amy could not keep back a little shriek of hysterical laughter.

"So!" came to her ears. "This is how *madame* returns kindness. She is of a piece with that *coquin* of a husband of hers! *Mon Dieu*, but it is Paulette Chînaux that will learn my lady when she comes to Canuck Gulch not to leave her fine manners on the high-road."

Amy, blinking back into consciousness, found the awakening process hastened by a vicious shake that sent her reeling to the floor. Her restoration was completed by a glance at the mantel timepiece. The minute-hand pointed to quarter of one. She had wasted fifteen precious minutes in a silly fainting fit! Only fifteen more remained in which to work out Neil's deliverance.

"Save—Neil—save—Neil—save—Neil!" the thumping recommenced. Only this time the tripping machine seemed to voice blackest despair.

Black Pete turned toward the door. With

a terse twist of his stubby thumb, he summoned the villainous quartet into line.

Amy reached forward and made a desperate clutch at his ragged coat-sleeve. The next moment she sprang to her feet with quick determination.

"Stay!" she commanded. "You shall not go! I have something to say to you and you are going to remain and hear it!"

The ring of authority in the stirring words astounded nobody more than herself. A power, a something outside her personality, whose puppet she was, seemed all at once to take complete command of her mental forces.

Swiftly her eye swept the shabby room. It lighted in turn on the tumble-down stools, tiny stove, tub of steaming clothes, lastly, on an object in the farther corner. And it was that object, Amy knew instinctively, which, in the coming battle of life and death, was to decide the issue.

It was inconspicuous enough, nothing more or less than a slender stick of logwood. There was no mistaking it—the darkish-brown hue and hacked surface from which the bark had been peeled. It was a remnant, probably, from Black Pete's latest thieving raid.

That ruffianly gentleman now accosted Amy with disdainful impatience.

"*Madame* forgets," he reminded her with a growl, "that we have work on hand."

"And I, too, have work on hand," returned Amy, meeting his supercilious leer with unflinching steadiness. Then pointing to the corner: "Do you see that stick? Bring it to me!"

Black Pete hesitated. His slow brain could not all at once take in the amazing change from the clinging, begging woman of the moment before to this new masterful creature who ordered him about without explanation or apology.

"Do as I say! And be quick about it!"

Moved more by curiosity than any other emotion, Black Pete slunk over to the corner with doglike docility.

Amy fairly snatched the logwood stick from his grasp. The rest of the group shuffled uneasily. On the face of each was a dull inquisitiveness not unmingled with fear. Paulette had dried her red hands on a scrap

of apron and now slumped heavily onto a stool. The wretch who had attacked Amy on the road edged nearer the door.

"You think to have revenge, do you not?" began Amy. "And for what? For a man's having the courage to uphold his rights when you stole from him." She paused dramatically. "Stole from him, I say. Do you hear? I am not afraid, you see, to call things by their right names."

Black Pete growled sullenly.

"Only a few sticks of that good-for-nothing wood," he objected. "It was little enough to ask."

"Did not *monsieur* tell you the wood was not common fire-wood?" An unbroken silence followed the question.

"Did not *monsieur* also tell you that the wood was precious—that it cost much money?" Again no answer.

"Did not *monsieur*," pursued Amy, "tell you still another thing—that it came from a far-away southern country—Honduras by name?" The dogged silence continued.

"Ah, you do not answer me!" went on Amy. "You know well he told you all these things. But one thing he did not tell you. That was his secret and mine. I am going to tell it to you now. You may not listen. You may not believe. You may still carry out your threat and—and—kill my husband. But don't think for a minute your revenge will be the only one. A worse revenge, more horrible than you can imagine, will fall on your own heads."

An unintelligible mutter greeted the threatening words. Black Pete tried to throw off his anxiety with a contemptuous laugh, but it was hollow and unconvincing. One man stealthily made the sign of the cross.

"*Monsieur* told you, as I have said," continued Amy, "that the wood was rare, that it was costly, that it had to be brought from a long distance. All true. But what he kept back was this"—her voice dropped to a suitable melodramatic whisper—"the wood is also magic."

Five pairs of startled, credulous eyes were turned upon her.

"Yes, magic," she repeated, answering the unspoken questions of her auditors. "You wouldn't think so to merely look at

it or to handle it." She held the stick forward that they might investigate. By a common impulse the group fell back.

"So we will put it to the test," she said, "which is this. Where there is crime, the wood bleeds in the presence of the guilty ones. In Honduras they call it the Red Curse. And the sight of the Red Curse means that the blood the criminals have shed will cry out until their own blood is shed. Not right away, perhaps, but in time—yes. Not one of you"—she singled out each swarthy face in turn with a searching, stony glance—"will live to die a natural death in his bed. You can travel to the ends of the earth, but the curse will follow you. So, take care. Think well before you do this thing you have in mind."

Black Pete managed to pull himself together. He was not in the habit of being frightened easily. He was the leader of the band, and he knew full well that unless he took a stand at once, his prestige would disappear forever. And this prestige—though he did not call it by that name—was the thing he lived by.

"*Madame* talks—talks—talks," he flung out with an air of bravado. "That is all. Why does she not *show* that she speaks true?"

"That is just what I'm coming to," promptly returned Amy. "The charm comes first."

She closed her eyes. In vain she tried to recall some appropriate rime that would answer the purpose. None came. The only thing that entered her head were the simple lines that dated from childhood days:

Starlight—star bright—
First star I've seen to-night!
Wish I may, wish I might
Have the wish I wish to-night.

"Never mind," the swift thought ran through her head, "that will do as well as anything if I repeat it under my breath." So, in an attitude of solemn detachment almost as if at prayer, she repeated the nursery formula.

The Canuck Gulch squatters followed her moving lips with awe-stricken attention.

Aloud, Amy next called out: "One—two—three." Then, holding the logwood stick

high in air, directly over the tub, she thrust it straight down into the midst of the steaming, soapy mass. Next, she gave the clothes a vigorous stirring, repeating the rime the while.

The sharpened faces that peered, half in fear, half in fascination, over the edge of the tub were a profound study. To an artist they would have suggested a peep of primitive souls into the Inferno. In a twinkling, terror had chased doubt from their minds, boastfulness had given place to abject cowardice.

For the water had gone red—a dark, sickish, murderous red! The bubbly scum was bloody scum. The clothes themselves were crimson clothes. With the magic stick Amy lifted one of the garments above the water. It chanced to be a shirt of Black Pete's. The red liquid poured from it in rivulets.

There was no doubt as to the impression made on the stricken group. Their breath came in quick, hard gasps. It must be as *madame* had said. For, unless it were so, how could a stick play such tricks?

Still Black Pete, quaking though he was, decided to show his last trump.

"You do strange things, *madame*," he assented. "*Bien*. But suppose—just suppose—that I can do as much? Will it not mean that the Red Curse will follow *madame*, maybe?"

A stab went through Amy's heart. She felt sick and faint. Then another inspiration came to her aid.

"Very well, we will see. Get me another stick." She knew well that Black Pete must still have a hidden pile.

He crouched through a low opening into a sort of shedlike ell and returned with the logwood stick. After which, at her command, he took a big basin and filled it from a spring near the back door.

"Go ahead," encouraged Amy. "You don't know the charm, but still it may work without." Black Pete's imitation of Amy's gestures was ludicrous in the extreme—or would have been had tragedy not been lurking in the background.

"*Un—deux—trois!*" The stick was thrust into the basin, the stirring began, but—not a single drop of red oozed from it!

Furious, Black Pete stirred harder and harder, faster and faster, until utterly exhausted. Still the Red Curse failed to do his frantic bidding. At length, in a transport of rage, he threw the stubborn stick onto the floor and stamped on it. He flung his arms wildly into the air.

"You have your answer," said Amy.

"*Sainte Vierge!*" at last came Black Pete's hoarse cry. "The holy saints are with you, my lady." By this time even Paulette was fairly groveling.

"Is it too late to turn back the curse?" weakly whined one man.

"For see, *madame*," supplemented a companion ingratiatingly, "we have not yet done that wicked thing."

"But you mean to," Amy replied, "and very soon, too. So what's the difference? The crime is in your hearts, which amounts to the same thing."

"But we repent, my lady," spoke up Black Pete. "There is very little we of Canuck Gulch have fear of. But to be chased by a Red Curse—*mon Dieu*, it is too much! We make our confession. And is it not true: 'Better late than never'?"

"But I regret me," said Amy, repeating Black Pete's words of the moment before with tantalizing deliberation, "'that this is one of the times there is no 'better' about the lateness.'" She pondered deeply. "Still," at last she resumed, "if you swear to me you will never attempt the life of a living soul and ask *monsieur's* forgiveness, I will pray that the Red Curse pass from you. But, understand, so long as a single stick of this magic wood remains under the roof of any one of you, just so long will it work its will. Now one of you take me to *monsieur* and we will see what can be done."

II.

NEIL BEACH and the river village's one doctor worked over the recumbent form lying on the office couch for two long, anxious hours that afternoon. Unconsciousness had set in and there was every indication of brain fever. Now and then a pitiful shudder ran through Amy's frame from head to foot as she clung convulsively to Neil with unintelligible murmurs about a "red curse" and "logwood wash."

Black Pete's fawning words of apology had given her husband but a glimmering hint of what had happened. All the doctor could say was: "A severe shock of some sort." The true situation was veiled in mystifying darkness.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, Amy opened her eyes.

"It paid, didn't it, dear?" she weakly whispered.

Neil bent tenderly. "What paid, sweet-heart?" he asked.

"Being—being—your side partner—"

"Of course, of course," he soothed.

"Now try to forget everything and go to sleep, darling."

"Wasn't it—funny," the thin voice went on, unheeding, "that sentence should—should have—saved you—and me—"

The doctor looked at Neil Beach significantly. "Mind wandering again," his expression said plainly.

Amy intercepted the look. Her forehead wrinkled into a slight frown of impatience. Then looking up into her husband's face: "Let me tell—tell you—Neil, dear," she pleaded. "I found—the—the sentence—in those books—I studied—chemistry, you know—you used to tease me about—when I made up my mind—to learn—the dye product—business—with you—the sentence was—something—like this: 'In the presence—of hot alkali—logwood absorbs—absorbs oxygen—and is—converted into—a dark red—coloring matter—'"

An amused ripple of laughter interrupted the broken narrative. "I little thought—

I would make—the test—in Black Pete's shack—with logwood—stolen from you—or that—Paulette's soapy water—Paulette's his wife, you know—would be the—alkali—"

Neil Beach pulled himself up sharply. He began to see light. By aid of a few skilful questions, he soon wrung the whole strange truth from Amy's lips. At the close he merely murmured: "Dear little side partner—" His voice was too choked to say more. But it did not prevent him from holding her close—so close that the doctor looked on with alarm lest his young patient suffer from suffocation as well as nerve prostration. He started to interfere—then, being a man of sense, said nothing and discreetly turned his back.

III.

By sundown the rumor had spread throughout the river village that Canuck Gulch was absolutely forsaken. Investigation proved this to be truer than most current reports. Black Pete and his tribe had unquestionably decamped, bag and baggage. As it turned out later, they had taken the trail to a new squatting ground many miles distant, across the Canadian border.

With two exceptions, they left behind no souvenirs of their undesirable sojourn in the community. One of these reminders was a sizable pile of logwood neatly and orderly arranged in the wood-yard of the Beach works. The other was a tub of blood-red clothes in the shack once occupied by Black Pete and Paulette, his wife.

UNUTTERABLE

I WOULD not sing of thee in sluggish prose,
Nor round thy virtues pulseless phrases bind,
But with divinest passion unconfined,
I'd fain indulge in fine poetic throes,
And image all the grace thy beauty shows;
For thou art such a one as fills the mind
With dreams so bright, the soul is unresigned
When from the sight thy witching presence goes.
Thou standest there in such enchanting guise,
As if by love transfixed, irresolute.
I dare not come anear or speak to thee;
So stay thou ever thus before mine eyes,
Thou elfish maiden in a bathing suit,
That—whew! that wave has knocked the poesy out of me.

ANONYMOUS.

Through Rabat's Eyes

by Charles Beadle

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

MORDEN BAIRD, clubman and idler, had come to the Moroccan town of Gebel el Musar in the wild hope of somehow rescuing Eileen Seagrove and her father, who were being held to ransom for twenty thousand dollars by the bandit, Ben Ghali. Seagrove had always frowned upon his suit, despising Baird as a tango lizard and a fop; therefore young Morden was particularly anxious to prove himself by effecting a rescue.

Hiring one Rabat, or "Rabbit," a hillman guide with an amazing faculty for twisted English, the two set out for the bandit's lair after Morden, at Rabbit's urging, had disguised himself as a holy man—a mad saint—and, as such, held in deep veneration by the followers of Mohammed.

Arriving at Ben Ghali's stronghold, however, his disguise so far having proved perfect, Morden approached the tent which held the prisoners. Disclosing his identity to them, to their amazed delight, suddenly Ben Ghali, coming up, snatched off the green turban and the spectacles, which constituted Morden's principal disguise. He, too, would now be held for ransom.

But his cup was not full. A clatter of hoofs was heard and a wild shout. Racing down the hillside on a great, black stallion, in full flight, was Rabbit.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Morden savagely. "And now Rabbit's deserted me!"

CHAPTER VI.

A COUNTERPLOT.

THE quality in Rabbit that had won Morden's confidence was just an odd streak that made him what he loved to call an "osopher," a whim that where his fancy or affections were engaged he would remain as loyal as an Indian blood-brother; whereas, in any other circumstances, he would have had no more compunction in slitting the two Americans' throats and carrying off Eileen to the hills than any other wild thug of the mountains.

Perhaps, too, there was an element of vanity which aroused the combative instinct and promised pleasure in getting the better of Ben Ghali, whom he liked to consider a business rival, for in Morocco, where life is of less account than in the bad, old days of the West, any man's ambition, living for the day or the hour by circumstance

and religion, is to be a successful robber, whether in the mountains or under the imperial umbrella of the Sultan.

To attempt to rescue the Americans single-handed from Ben Ghali's men was obviously futile. But this was the Riff country, not so many miles as the stork flies from Rabbit's own mountain village; the inhabitants were hillmen, whereas Ben Ghali's were plainsmen; and therefore hated by all good hillmen who, although fearing him for the power which wealth had given him, were ever ready to have a cut at him when the opportunity occurred—particularly if there was a chance of loot or dourou (dollars).

Rabbit was far more resourceful than Morden imagined. He knew that as he could not hope to gather sufficient men to make an open attack, the affair must be a sudden raid. Yet the matter would have to be negotiated in the native manner.

This story began in *The Argosy* for August 2.

So it came about that a few hours later, from high up on the hillside shrouded in blue night, came a wailing in a minor key to the twanging as of harps chanting the sorrows of the hills. As the voice faded reluctantly the patient silence was merely scratched by the lament of a distant donkey, who was contradicted by the abrupt neigh of a stallion scornful of such feminine complaint, corroborated and asserted by the fretful yapping of village dogs.

In the midst of a paler blob of mud-huts, from which were stretched goat-hair blankets, the red glow of a fire gently painted the edges of gray robes and brown skins in the scented air of dung, smoke, and food. Once more began the tentative twang of the gimbri and the chant wailed sadly to the night:

"By what fair shrine did Fadma's parents
pray,
That earth and sky grow bright about her
way?
O Fadma! queen of beauty and of grace;
Uncrowned, for none save one hath seen her
face!

"All beauty, brothers, is a shrine,
A gift of Heaven, half divine!

"To match, fair dove, thy dainty, snow-
white plumes
Be straight prepared the castle's marble
rooms;
Wherein he'll pledge thee, queen of all delight,
In porcelain goblet, like thyself, all white!

"The stream's in spate for very joy and
pride
That Fadma's feet tripped through the crystal
tide.

"And may the mercy of the Lord belong.
To Sidi Hammo, singer of this song."

"Subhan Allah!" grunted a bearded face which protruded from a mass of gray robes upon a rug. "The soul of Sidi Hammo, whom Allah bless, will speak with our Lord for such a sweet nightingale as thou, O Rabat, son of Bussulham!"

"My soul is but an earthen goblet into which is poured the soul of Sidi Hammo," explained Rabat softly. "I do but lift the goblet to worthy lips."

"By the beard of the Prophet!" mur-

mured another man, "thy song is as the fluttering of the wings of Gabriel!"

"Aye, and as sweet as the rustle of the robes of the houris of paradise, by Allah!" swore a third.

"Let the flute of the throat caress our ears once more," demanded the bearded man.

"Nay, O Larbi," protested Rabat lazily, "the vessel is fouled with the liquor of the infidel."

"Yillah!" exclaimed the bearded Larbi with a mighty smack of the lips, "the sons of Shaitan are well served by their master—may Allah burn them!"

"Even as our Lord Mohammed hath said—may Allah bless him! That which is made by the hands of the infidel is lawful prize unto the sons of the faithful," commented Rabbit.

Guttural clamor accompanied an expectant stir as Rabbit rolled over and fumbled in the great pocket of his saddlebags which lay beside him.

"May Mohammed be thrice blessed for his wisdom!" Whisky gurgled into a tin cup. Larbi swallowed half a cup of the neat spirits at a gulp and smacked his lips.

"May Allah bless the faithful!"

"May Allah burn the infidel!" came from the next man as toast.

"Even the infidel was not made in vain," commenced a third ~~thirstily~~. "Great indeed is Allah, the All-Giving!"

"O son of Omar," suggested Rabbit, cup in hand, "let a story from the holy book be told that our souls may rejoice at the wisdom of the Uillema (holy scribes)!"

"Aye, let it be so!"

Then did Larbi cease the smacking of lips and begin the story of the grape-seed.

"In the name of Allah, the All-Compassionate, Merciful, and Mohammed, his Prophet, thus is it written in the book of Mulai Idrees which lies in the sacred mosque at Fez.

"And when Allah in his wrath decreed that the earth should be covered with water did he command Lord Noah to gather together two of every kind: beasts of the field and the birds of the air, seeds of grain and fruits that are of the soil. And so it was.

"And when the waters did subside according to the will of Allah, and all were came out of the ark upon the mountain of Ararat, lo! the seed of the grape was not! And Lord Noah lifted up his voice and prayed in exceeding fear of the wrath of Allah. And behold, the devil laughed and spoke, saying: "Verily did I send one of my chosen with thee that he might confound thee in the eyes of thy God!"

"And Lord Noah was confounded and wept yet more bitterly. And it came to pass that the devil agreed to return unto our Lord Noah the seed of the grape upon conditions that he shared with Lord Noah the honor of planting the seed. And so it was. They departed to the hillside, and the devil cut the throat of a peacock with which to water the newly planted seed; upon the next moon was a monkey sacrificed in like manner; upon the third moon a lion; and upon the fourth moon even an unclean pig.

"And so it is even unto this day that he who drinketh of one drop of the juice of the grape is swollen with the vain pride of a peacock; he who drinketh of two drops hath the mischievousness of a monkey; he of three drops as bold as a lion is he; but he of the four drops walloweth in the mire of the roadside as an unclean pig!"

"By the beard!" quoth one, chuckling, "indeed doth the infidel wallow like unto an unclean pig in the gutter! Have I not seen him oftentime in the city of the Tanga!"

"Let us to another cup that we may emulate the peacock!" urged another, "for verily the night is yet as young as a virgin."

"Thou hast more sense than the holy men of Koreish," affirmed Rabbit, manipulating the whisky bottle.

To the accompaniment of prodigious smacks of the lips, which is the cream of courtesy inasmuch that it shows the extent of appreciation of the refreshment provided by the host, the tin mug went again the round.

"By the beard of my father!" snickered one as the spirit warmed his soul, "would that we were in Fez this night, for I know of a houri who hath surely descended from

paradise who danceth like a true daughter of the desert!"

"Nay," said Rabbit dreamily, "more would I give to hear once again the song of the Walladah (mountain dancing girls)."

"Allah hath not taken my memory," said a young man with a profile like unto a Greek god. "Give me thy gimbri!"

Taking the two-stringed guitar from Rabbit, he rose with the effortless grace of an antelope. Swaying against the blue volume of the opposite hill, he thrummed a note-falling lilt to a chant of amorous adventure full of folk symbolism, while his dancing limbs grew more bronze in the flickering fire, and his eyes became romantic rivals of the stars. Beyond the fence around the huts rose the persistent munch of animals whose shapely forms were domed with the great saddles: squeals and the impact of irritable hoofs against a neighbor's ribs; scuffle of disturbed earth, and another fierce love-challenge rang down the still valley.

When the troubadour had tired, came applause in guttural oaths, and a merry quip that the company should imitate the monkey in the tale.

"May Allah in his goodness yet permit me to gaze down from my tent of pearl upon the infidels burning in hell!" quoth Rabbit heartily, after extracting the last drop from his mustache by the aid of his tongue.

"Verily," chortled Larbi, "if the houris of paradise be half as fair as Ramah, the moon of Wazzan, then may Mohammed in his bounty bid Gabriel to snatch me in his arms this night."

"And may the mercy of the Lord belong
To Sidi Hammo, singer of this song!"

chanted young Wakid.

"Nay," murmured Rabbit, reminiscently smacking his lips, "the monkey chattereth, but verily do I feel the throb of the king of beasts within me!"

"Aye," assented Larbi with a thick laugh, "truly am I athirst for the blood of the unrighteous!"

"He who lusteth after riches desireth a vain thing," quoted a sardonic voice from the shadow.

"Aye," agreed another, "thou hast

drunken of the well of truth, for that which is not there is surely vain!"

"Nay," commented Rabbit, "Allah is all-merciful, beneficent!"

"Thy words are shrouded in the cloak of night."

"Hath not our Lord so truly said that the unrighteous are like unto the flies in summer-time?"

"Verily they are more numerous than the stones upon the wayside!" exclaimed Rabbit. "Is it not pleasing in the sight of Allah to correct the ways of the unrighteous?"

"Allah is all-wise provident!" asserted Larbi, hopefully.

"Much merit is there in the mending of evil ways!" agreed a third.

"Is it not written that he of the faithful who entertaineth the infidel without just cause is unworthy of the blessings of Allah the Forgiving?"

"Behold the mantle of the Prophet hath descended upon the son of Bussulham!" jeered another impiously.

"Is not the scoffer despised by Allah?" retorted Rabbit. "Truly is it written that the third cup turneth men of holy mind to the chattering of the monkey!"

"Verily!" snorted Larbi. "Thy words are as yet as empty as the brook in flood-time!"

"Let us then take upon us the manner of the lion of which thou hast such sore need, thou men of weak faith!" commented Rabbit.

"Subhan Allah!" swore Larbi energetically to the music of the liquor, "the stream of thy words at last enters the deep well of knowing!"

"Truly Allah is merciful, forgiving, and loveth his children!" chanted another as he gazed fascinatedly at the silhouette of a tin cup against the stars.

Clopp, clopp! smacked Larbi. "Of a truth hath the blood of the mountain-lion entered my vitals!"

"Yillah!" swore the second drinker, "is my arm palsied for the lack of striking at the unrighteous!"

"By my father's beard!" swore the next, "thy spirit of holiness grows apace within me!"

"A-ah!" sighed Wakid, "verily it seems that the houris of paradise do mock me from the skies!"

"By the beard of Mulai Idrees!" shouted Rabbit, "is the mantle of wisdom descended upon this most unworthy son of my father!"

"Songs of desire are upon my tongue, but my lips are sewn with kisses that are not yet!" murmured Wakid, stretching luxuriously upon the mat.

"Listen, O my brethren!" continued Rabbit, ignoring romantic youth. "Allah in his mercy hath delivered into our hands the means of much merit, the chastening of sinners!"

"We are all sinners!" mumbled the grave one in the shadow. "But Allah is merciful!"

"And the giver of many douro (dollars)!"

"By Allah!" quoth Larbi, sitting upon his haunches, "is not his voice sweeter than the lark above the corn field?"

"Aye," agreed another, "to be poor is blessed, but it payeth not the uxorious caid (local governor). May Allah burn him!"

"Where is he who is unrighteously swollen with douro that I may cause him to be acceptable unto Allah?" demanded Larbi impatiently.

"Behold the lion roareth for the lamb that he may devour!" commented the sardonic one.

"Thy tongue is less melodious than the cry of the water-bearer in the market-place!" snapped Larbi. "Pour forth the honey of thy golden words, O anointed of Allah!"

"Well thou knowest this unrighteous man!" obeyed Rabbit. "Sheik Ben Ghali who dwelleth this night even at the village of Omar, the son of Shaib—"

"By Allah!" exclaimed one man, "hath Allah stricken thee with his blessing? Art crazy? Is he not Governor of Arzila, where indeed is his wealth stored?"

"Even so," agreed Rabbit imperturbably. "But thou art like unto one who condemneth the ground ere he hath sought for the well!"

"Aye, the yapping of the jackal," quoth Larbi, "deflecteth not the lion from his

chosen victim! Continue, O father of words!"

"With the son of Bekr are three infidels, two men *Americana*, as ye know of great wealth, and one girl fairer than the partridge at harvest time!"

"By Allah!" exclaimed Wakid, sitting up, "what color is her hair? And didst say that she was plumper than the partridge?"

"Knowest not, O fool from the mountain, that all infidel women are skinnier than thine own goats! We speak not of lust, but of that which is even fairer, for the father and lover of the maiden have more wealth than our lord, the Sultan! With Ghali this night are but scarce a dozen men, and they plainsmen. With swiftness and a mighty arm can we pluck the prize from the hands of the unrighteous robber who is so overfat with wealth that blood-letting may perhaps save his unworthy life!"

"By the beard of Khalid, the sword of God!" swore Larbi, rising to his height, "am I not more than the equal of twenty lions this dark night? Come thou! And I alone shall lead ye! To horse! To horse! for the dark cloak of Allah will shield us to victory!"

"To horse!" echoed Rabbit, springing up. "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Benevolent!"

CHAPTER VII.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN—

"MY dear boy, you've just swallowed the pill like any rube!" snorted Seagrove disgustedly as Morden finished the account of his adventures. "It's just as plain as the Statue of Liberty. This wonderful fellow of yours is just the stool-pigeon of our Tammany friend."

"But it was very brave of Morden, dad!" protested Eileen. "And he meant—"

"Meant! You know where good intentions lead? Right here!"

"You'd pay more than that to get out of *that* place, dad!" retorted his daughter, and her hand sought Morden's in the shadow of the dimly lighted tent.

Seagrove stared savagely into the darkness. The train of circumstances and their present plight had given rise to an uneasy feeling that his daughter was in some respects wiser than he, a reflection disconcerting to his vanity, for indeed the motivating principle of his action in bargaining with Ben Ghali had not been the actual sum of twenty thousand dollars, but the instinct to get the better in a business deal for the joy thereof rather than the money.

Being by temperament courageous and as a civilized city man unaware of the real danger, he had at first looked upon the whole affair as rather a joke. However, this repressed longing for romance had been thoroughly satiated by the week's residence in adventure's rude tent.

Now the disgust against himself for having been so foolish as to permit childish sentiments to conjure up such personal discomforts was expressed in the irritable attitude toward both his daughter and Morden.

As for Eileen the said discomforts, although fully appreciated by her as experienced for the first time in her sheltered life, were somewhat mitigated now by the seemingly, miraculous appearance of her lover in spite of the fact that apparently his efforts were rendered abortive; a romantic fact that had a similiar reaction upon Morden in discounting even the disastrous effects of following the advice of the philosophic Rabbit.

No matter how much Seagrove might rail at the financial advantage gained by the wily brigand and his alleged accomplice, that did not alter the sweet fact that the night was soft and balmy, and the stars were made the brighter by the gentle pressure of his beloved's hand.

"Listen!" whispered Eileen. "Do you hear? Some one playing a guitar!"

"Yes, it's a two-stringed thing they call a gimbri. That fellow Rabbit was alway playing it on the road," said Morden.

"Perhaps they are dancing," added Eileen.

"Perhaps that confounded thief of yours is discounting the dollars," muttered Seagrove sourly, giving vent to a half-suppressed knowledge that he was a quite unnecessary third.

"Oh, dad, don't be so—so like a miser, for Heaven's sake!"

"It isn't the dollars," protested her father. "But—"

"Be quiet, dad!" exclaimed Eileen hastily. "And anyhow it's a perfectly wonderful adventure even—even if I haven't had a bath for weeks."

"That's what adventure is!" snapped Seagrove, with a ghost of a chuckle in his voice. "Going without a bath!"

The three sat staring out at the night, listening to the wail of a distant voice which was answered by the staccato neigh from across the valley.

"You know," commented Morden, breaking the discreet silence, "somehow or other I can't believe that fellow has deserted me."

"What? The guide, Morden?" queried Eileen.

"If you can think up a more obvious plant I should like to hear ~~it~~" commented Seagrove. A melancholy donkey brayed a solemn assent. "What's the recipe for this wonderful optimism?"

"Well, you don't know him," said Morden diffidently. "He—well, he seems rather a curious character. And he's very attractive in many ways."

"Sure, he's attractive," said Seagrove grimly. "Did you ever know a confidence man who wasn't? That's his line."

"Would you say that every person who deals in attractions is dishonest, then?" demanded Morden quietly.

"Yes, *would* you, dad?" added Eileen, chuckling in response to a secret pressure. "Because if so—"

"I get you, girl!" said Seagrove, after a pause. "But—but I'd appreciate Morden's sense of humor more had he put his deal over. To tell the honest-to-God truth I'd give twenty dollars for a smoke! That's what the matter with me, I really do believe!"

"If I haven't broken them," said Morden, fumbling beneath his saint's rags, "I think that I can supply you, sir. Yes, here they are! I—I've been so—so long a saint that I've nearly forgotten how to smoke!" And he held out two perfectly good cigars.

Seagrove stared incredulously; took them in silence as if his heart were too full for

words; bit off the end of one and lighted it at the candle lantern. Then he sighed prodigiously and remarked in a completely different voice:

"Morden, I—I have infinite respect for you."

"Thank you!" said Morden laughing. "But really—you see I daren't smoke them myself!"

"I have observed," purred Seagrove, "through a long and arduous life that sometimes a streak of luck may change a man's whole career. In this case I"—puff, puff—"in this case, Morden, I shall be most pleased to abandon business principles and lead over the extra ransom to this ruffian and—and try to appreciate you better."

"That's mighty fine of you, sir, but—"

"But wait!" exclaimed Eileen laughing. "Wait until he's finished these cigars!"

"Go to sleep, child!" said her father, "and leave me to—"

"Enjoy more than you deserve, dad? I will. Good night, dad! Good night, dear," she whispered to Morden, and retired by the simple process of wrapping a coarse rug around her upon the mat with a bundle of robes as a pillow, a bed which two weeks of practise had taught her to appreciate. And upon the opposite end of the mat her lover curled up in his rags, finding them more blessed than the smoothest of New York sheets.

In the yellow halo of the candle lantern glowed red a cigar tip; the smoke curled lazily and hung like a houri's veil over a face carved in alabaster and old ivory. The distant gimbri had ceased. Outside the mountainous night purred softly.

Seagrove exhaled smoke through his small nostrils with real gratitude. He glanced quizzically at the form of Morden with a vague sense of irritation. He saw an open eye regarding him over a blanket fold.

"Are you asleep, Morden?" he inquired.

"U-m—yes," said Morden mendaciously.

"Why don't you smoke?"

"I'm—I'm tired out."

"Oh!" Seagrove frowned at the tent door. The satisfaction of the craving for nicotin had warmed up his social instincts. He struggled for a few moments and surrendered.

"Morden!"

"Yes?"

"Are you still asleep?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

Seagrove inhaled fiercely, caught the eye over the blanket and grinned. Morden squirmed into a half-sitting posture.

"Are you going to smoke?"

"Yes, I think I will."

After fumbling beneath the robes Morden withdrew a case. Seagrove watched him light the cigarette.

"Hog!" he commented.

"Why? You have a cigar?"

"Yes, but—well, after being deprived of any civilized thing for so long—queer! When you can't get something you want to corner the market more than ever!"

"Yes." Morden glanced very swiftly at the sleeping form on the other side of the tent. "I—I've noticed that."

Seagrove saw the glance and smiled. They smoked in silence.

"Perhaps I've—I've been rather hasty in—in judging you, Morden—I mean"—trying to squash an idea that he was about to go too far in sheer gratitude for two fifteen-cent cigars—"I mean that if"—he nodded across the tent—"and all that, perhaps I might have given you a chance to prove that you—you could make good if you really wanted to."

"I can."

Seagrove glanced at him anew, faintly surprised at a tone of decision with which he was unfamiliar in the previous knowledge of Morden in New York.

"H-m! Well, you haven't yet. You merely made a mess of it. I mean more expensive than ever."

Again they smoked in silence.

"I don't know about that, sir," suddenly propounded Morden. "I—I haven't lots of money, but—well, it seems to me that what I've learned already since I—I've entered this extraordinary adventure—I mean that it's worth much more than dollars."

"H-m! Romantic!"

"Well, sir, isn't this romance? Have you ever experienced such—such a new point of view, such new manners of living in your life?"

"Yes," snapped Seagrove. "In the movies!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Morden, when a slight twitch of his robe startled him.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing!" asserted Morden, who had seen a hand like a white mouse flit under the bundle which represented Eileen. "I—I thought I heard something. Probably that guard man moving about. He jerked the cigarette through the tent door. 'I think I'll go to sleep, sir. Good night!'"

"H-m! Good night."

Seagrove smoked on resentfully and began to try to persuade himself to sign away the required money in the morning without further ado as the better way out of a fool adventure. Just as he pitched the cigar butt out of the tent and grunting disgustedly began to curl up in his communal portion of the mat, he heard the distant thrum of hoofs.

He blew out the candle and grumbled the more at the adaptability of youth in adjusting itself to the circumstances. His eyes opened at the near-by yapping of dogs as irritably as if he were being disturbed by the removal of garbage cans in the morning. The thrum of hoofs was nearer.

"What on earth ever possessed me to come to this fool country Heaven only knows!" he grumbled discontentedly. "If these confounded Europeans would only—"

A pistol shot and the reverberating echo startled him. The three sat up abruptly. Followed a volley of shots, violent yapping of dogs, and the thunder of galloping hoofs. The explosion of a rifle immediately behind the tent squeezed a scream from Eileen and an oath from her father. An unexpected silence save for the gallop of horses was shattered by a renewed outburst of yells and shots. Instinctively the three prisoners rose to their feet.

"Morden!" whispered Eileen.

"Sh! dear!" He consoled her with his arm about her. "It's all right!"

"All right be damned!" exclaimed Seagrove. "What the—"

Then above the shouts and noise rose a shout:

"Hello, ol' chap!"

"Thank God!" yelled Morden at father and daughter. "It's Rabbit!"

The next moment, to the gruff exclamations of men and snorts of animals, the party drew up before the darkened tent.

"You come quick, ol' chap, and your girl!" came Rabbit's voice. "Wild man he come, too."

"Dear!" exclaimed Eileen, shrinking instinctively from being parted from her lover and father.

"Quick, Eileen! Please!" urged Morden.

"Where your girl?" demanded Rabbit, bending over his horse in the doorway of the tent. "By Sinfooloosir! You get girl 'long me!"

Without hesitation Morden picked Eileen up and hoisted her beside Rabbit.

"Oh, boy!" assured Rabbit. "You miss hug me, what? Fine! You go 'long my frien' Larbi! An' you, lady father, go 'long Wakid! Fine! Quick! Wild man he come, too!"

Urged by the confidence of Morden and the fact that Eileen was already on a horse beside Rabbit, Seagrove obeyed and was dragged roughly beside his destined rescuer as Morden scrambled behind Larbi.

Immediately the cavalcade wheeled and galloped off into the night, Eileen clinging desperately to Rabbit and thoroughly enjoying the excitement in spite of her natural nervousness.

Renewed yells, shots, and the scattered flashes of rifles from the village a hundred yards away informed the party that Ben Ghali did not intend to part with his booty without an effort at recovery.

Sprawling sidewise upon the back of the great saddle, Eileen clung desperately to Rabbit, wishing fervently that she had adopted man's riding breeches. But she even spluttered as she heard Rabbit's voice reassuring her:

"All right, ol' lady, you frien' o' Rabbit, an' your lover frien' o' Rabbit! You hug me tight, we loose brig'n', an' come 'long my frien's. Yessir, madam!"

And Eileen had to hug tight as instructed, for their course lay down the steep hill, and Rabbit's spurs were apparently busy. Once she heard a whistling sound which, fortunately for her momentary peace

of mind, she did not recognize as the whine of a bullet. Only was she conscious of the heaving stars above a dim and wobbly line of hilltops, and of the thrum of galloping hoofs near to them. At last the stars ceased to wobble so violently. The horse slowed to a walk.

"Morden! Dad!" she cried.

"Eileen!" called Morden. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. But dad?"

"I'm here, damnation!" came Seagrove's voice to comfort his daughter.

"What's the matter?"

"Matter! My back's broken, my right leg's gone to sleep, and my nails are torn off, and this fellow stinks like a skunk! Hell!"

"Fine!" shouted Rabbit, catching the drift. "Mohammed he say you have 'rage in 'versity'!"

CHAPTER VIII.

—INTO THE FIRE.

"OH, Lordy, I'm so sore I scarcely dare move!" moaned Seagrove, stretched on the flowered turf of the mountainside. "Every durned bone seems broken!"

"I feel bruised all over, and it's chilly, too!" agreed Eileen; "but still, dad, this is better than paying all those dollars to a brigand!"

"H-m!" snorted Seagrove ungratefully, "I don't know that I'd rather not have paid the confounded money than be treated like a sack of potatoes—and, anyway, it's only one hold-up for another."

"No, Mr. Seagrove," said Morden wearily, "the arrangement was that Rabbit here was to rescue you for one-fourth of the ransom demanded. And I think he'll keep to the bargain, just as he has not deserted us now."

"Oh, do be quiet, you two!" protested Eileen. "What does it matter, now we're free? Oh, to think that I shall have a bath soon! It's just too romantic!"

"Romantic!" muttered her father, moving his limbs warily.

The hills on the opposite side of the valley were suffused with pale rose: even

a wisp of blue smoke rising from a group of huts a mile away was tinged with violet, and each member of the party was shimmered in radiant gold until the sun was come to the ridge of the mountain top.

Squatted in a circle near the animals were Rabbit, Larbi, Wakid, and their friends chattering softly in the hill tongue. As soon as the sun was warm upon the face Rabbit rose and came over to the three Americans.

"You get busy! Come 'long, my frien's!" commanded Rabbit amiably. "No good 'fidels stop here cos wild man come 'long soon!"

"What on earth's the man talking about?" demanded Seagrove, unwilling to move his aching limbs.

"He says," interpreted Morden rising, "that we must get a move on, or—or we'll get arrested for obstructing the traffic! Come, Eileen!"

"Don't be a fool!" muttered Seagrove peevishly.

"Never mind, dad!" cried Eileen cheerfully, as Morden helped her to rise, "we'll just phone for a taxi!"

Seagrove merely snorted at this untimely levity and rolled over in a most undignified manner onto his hands and knees, from which posture he could raise his weary body the more easily. He stood watching sourly while Eileen was assisted into the saddle of Rabbit's mount.

"Now fat gen'l'man he get up on him horse!" urged Rabbit, indicating the mountainous saddle of Wakid's animal.

"Yes, come on, dad! We'll be in Tangiers in no time now!" urged Eileen, smiling.

Seagrove walked painfully to the place of torture and turned with a grim smile.

"Say, daughter," said he, "if any of those strenuous-life fools at the country club talk my head off again about the joys of exercise just jolt me up to send 'em to our friend here!"

However this time the strangers, unused to the Moorish gymnastics, were a little more comfortable; for, at Rabbit's instigation, they each one occupied the saddle proper with the escort riding on the animal's rump.

"Hey!" shouted Seagrove as he moved off. "You, guide! What time are we due at Tangiers?"

Rabbit, whose brown legs stuck out on either side, was engaged in persuading a native cigarette to submit to be lighted. He peered around curiously as if in search of some strange animal making a strange noise; but his eyes sought everywhere but the man from whom the shout had arisen.

"Hey!" shouted Seagrove irritably. "You! Morden!" he added, "doesn't the idiot understand English?"

"Rabbit," said Morden from the other side, "Mr. Seagrove's asking you what time we shall arrive at Tangiers?"

Rabbit stared across at Seagrove and smiled blandly.

"Mos' strawdin'ry," he announced carefully. "I think he make noise cos he have pain in him tummy. Mos' strawdin'ry! Mr. Seagrove, me Mr. Rabbit, 'osopher an' frien', by Sinfooloosir! Yessir!"

Eileen snickered and turned away her head, not daring to catch Morden's eyes beside her. Seagrove stared perplexedly.

"What the devil's he driving at?" he demanded. "I don't understand."

"Un'erstan'?" echoed Rabbit quickly. "Him very true words. Mohammed he wise man. He say 'fidel never un'erstan' heart of Mohammed man. An' just cos that, he go hell catch green spiders. Yes-sir."

"Rabbit," interposed Morden, comprehending that somehow the queer Rabbit considered himself insulted, "when do you think that we shall get to Tangiers?"

Rabbit turned his head to him and smiled benignly.

"'Fidel he say we 'rive Tanga six 'clock twenty minute. Mohammed man he say we 'rive when Allah wills. Mos' strawdin'ry wise man, huh?"

"What's he say?" demanded Seagrove.

"He means that he doesn't know when we'll get there, dad," interpreted Eileen.

"Probably to-night," added Morden, aware that Rabbit was in a cantankerous mood and fearful of consequences if Seagrove persisted.

"I still believe that fellow's a fraud," muttered Seagrove disgustedly.

"Oh, dad!" protested Eileen. "Look what's he's done for us already, and Morden, too."

"Forget it, daughter," returned her father. "My body's in pieces, and I'm so hungry that I could eat—eat this succulent joint behind me!" he added with a wry smile.

"Succulent joint!" repeated Rabbit diligently. "Succulent joint."

They rode in silence for some time, save for the "Rrrrh!" of the objurgations of the men to the various steeds. All three of the late prisoners were stiff and aching; with two, youth provided an anodyne; but with the elder man old bones made sore bones.

Morden observed that they were traveling upon a different path to that by which he had come, for the walled village where he had for the first time seen the notorious Ben Ghali did not appear.

In spite of his share of the aching muscles he was quite naturally happy to be in the presence of his beloved and was buoyed by the fact that he had, with the aid of his most admirable Rabbit, succeeded in rescuing her; and moreover had attained that without the need of payment of the ransom by her father, a fact that he was convinced would weigh with that gentleman more than any romantic heroism.

Although he was conscious of a faint disgust prompted by carefree youth for his perspective father-in-law's fanatical consideration of money, yet he knew, rather in theory than in practise, that it was by virtue of that weakness or strength that Charles King Seagrove was the eminent person he was. And while meditating upon that character Morden grew aware of a queer sense of an abyss of misunderstanding between the modern mind and that of Rabbit and his kindred.

At bottom he divined there was much of the same appreciation of the worldly value of wealth in each type, yet withal a totally different process in arriving at the same conclusion; even more, a different method. However, apart from these speculations, he felt content in the fact that very soon they would all three be back in an environment which was, if unsympathetic to him, understandable to all three.

Charles K. Seagrove, to do him justice, was not so obtuse regarding the character of Rabbit as he seemed. Rather, as he had inferred, was he unbalanced by the physical suffering to which he had been subjected; no easy philosophy had he to compensate for a long life of comparative ease and comfort.

Also another fact disturbed and destroyed his sense of humor; the unexpected arrival of Morden, portending the early loss of his daughter, the truth of which he did not desire in the least to admit.

His feeling was indeed quite a logical reaction to the many years' devotion of a widower whose only private excuse for making still more money was the vague, not to be analyzed, future of his only daughter.

And now he felt that, in spite of any argument that he might foolishly adopt, his Eileen would not listen to any refusal to a union with her lover; would protest in no uncertain terms that not only had Morden proved that he could attain something when it appeared worth while to him as he saw life, but moreover that he had put her father distinctly under an obligation for having saved him so many sordid dollars; a reflection that was humiliating and unjust, as he knew in his heart that the actual dollars were, after all, to him as he saw it, merely material assurance of happiness for Eileen which she in her youth could hardly be expected to comprehend.

But to Eileen the meeting with her chosen lover stimulated every sense to the enjoyment of beauty; continually a pæan of joy sang within her heart, because the lover condemned by her father whom she sincerely loved had in a miraculous way, as she saw it, proved his undeniable worth.

In her youthful contempt for the practical things of life she had nourished a half-suppressed disgust for what she designated a wholly undignified regard for wealth.

These unexpected happenings had given her much joy in the defeat of her father's pet conviction, yet a defeat which was not sullied by contempt, but rather by a vague understanding, in the light of her generosity, of her victory that her father could not be blamed for the habits of a lifetime contracted in a sordid and realistic world.

Also, during those many months of touring through Europe, although she had determined that she would never give up Morden, yet she had been conscious of a desire that in some extraordinary way he would prove himself the heroic figure which she nourished, as any woman does, in her innermost heart.

And behold! Had he not done so? So it was that in spite of a perpetual ache in her back as she stretched in futile attempt to gain momentary surcease, was there nothing save pure joy!

"Your lover he no like your father," murmured Rabbit's voice in the back of her.

"No! No! You're wrong. Mr. Baird is very fond of my father," whispered Eileen hastily, and wondered why she had protested.

"No," insisted Rabbit. "You young, you not know. Mohammed he know. He say father he never like lover for him daughter, and lover he never like father for him girl. Sure. He knows cos he have four, five, six, seven wives. He wise man."

"Nonsense!" asserted Eileen, smiling to herself. "And I think your Mohammed was a very bad man."

"Mohammed!" exclaimed Rabbit aghast. "He most wise man ever was. By Sin-foolooosir! Why he bad man?" he persisted. "Cos he have plenty wife, huh? If he not have plenty wife how he know about womans, huh? S'posin' Rabbit he only drink one drink; he drink only red wine. How he know white wine good, too? One woman brandy, one woman red wine, one woman white wine, one woman beer. Rabbit no like beer. Rabbit like wine—" Then suddenly: "You white wine!"

"I am!" gasped Eileen. "For mercy's sake, what do you mean?"

"I know," said the strange voice behind her. "I drink all wines."

"Oh, you awful creature!" exclaimed Eileen laughing.

"Awf'ly strawdin'ry creature!" asserted Rabbit proudly. "Awf'ly strawdin'ry! I see back of your neck. Fine! Jus' like white grape wine. All you jus' like white wine; also I smell 'briating—'toxicating! Oh, boy!"

"Morden!" called Eileen, more than half

complimented by Rabbit's simile, "this strange creature says I smell! I'm like white wine! Have you ever heard anything so ridiculous?"

"What!" said Morden, smiling. "What did you say, Eileen?"

"I say," interposed Rabbit swiftly, "you girl he smell jus' like white wine!"

Eileen laughed. Came Rabbit's swift whisper:

"Whaffor you say fool words? Now your lover he want kill! Sure! Woman Nazarene no good make love. Talk too much. Yessir!"

"Don't be ridiculous!" said Eileen between laughter. "Morden, now he says you want to kill him because he says I smell like white wine! Did you ever!"

"If you try to make love to my girl," said Morden smiling, "I'll surely have to punch your head; you know that, Rabbit?"

"Punch my head?" echoed Rabbit. "No, sir! I no make love your girl. You my frien', huh? Awf'ly strawdin'ry! Rabbit like wine; but like brandy more better. When Rabbit want make love your girl he jus'—" Rabbit gestured across his throat, grinning cheerfully. "Then he take your girl 'long his other wives. That Mohammed way, yessir."

Foolish as he felt it to be, Morden shuddered, realizing indeed how easy it would be for Rabbit to have carried out his threat had he so willed. Ridiculous but—almost automatically he glanced down the trail ahead.

"How far to Tangiers now, Rabbit?" he demanded.

"Allah, he knows!" returned Rabbit enigmatically, as if reading Morden's thoughts and desiring to tease him.

"You mos' awf'ly funny woman!" asserted Rabbit conversationally, when Morden by reason of his slower steed had fallen back a little. "Your lover he not know what good wine! Then I tell you something, you talk like crazy girl, make much trouble. Mohammed woman he no talk like that, he say nothing. He jus' think an' laugh."

"That's why you have to lock them up in the harem," retorted Eileen, smiling.

"Sure," assented Rabbit. "Cos Mohammed man he know womans. Yessir."

"Well, he didn't know American women!"

"'Merican woman? 'Merican woman he no 'vented then."

"She certainly was not!" concurred Eileen, much amused. "Are you married, Rabbit?"

"Married—Rabbit? Sure. Plenty time married. Rabbit have two wife, put away three wife; now look for 'nother. Oh, boy!"

"You're perfectly awful, Rabbit!"

"Sure! Perfectly awf'ly!" assented Rabbit cheerfully. Then, after a slight pause: "What you mean?"

"What do I mean! Why—well, it's wrong to have so many wives, Rabbit. Don't you know that?"

"Wrong? Whaffor wrong?" queried Rabbit. "'Merican he 'vorce wife if he want, huh?"

"'Vorce'? Oh, divorce, you mean. But he doesn't have several wives at once."

"Once? Course not!" assented Rabbit. "No man drink sev'ral bottle wine same time, huh? When he tired that bottle white wine he put away. Sure. Take red wine. Good. When he tired two times he take brandy. More better!"

"Good Heavens, what an idea!"

"'Dea'? Sure! You think like that cos you opening new bottle wine." Rabbit glanced appraisingly at Morden. "Your lover white wine, too, yessir. He taste good, huh? Bimeby you tired same taste. You want red wine. Course. He no like white wine. Want red wine. He put you away. Sure," very confidentially.

"You don't understand love, Rabbit," said Eileen, in a graver tone. "We very seldom divorce anybody."

"What!" gasped Rabbit. "What you do? You go on drink wine you no more like! Strawdin'ry! Awf'ly strawdin'ry!"

"Morden! Morden!" cried Eileen, laughing. "Do come alongside and listen to this extraordinary creature's ideas! They're the funniest ever!"

"You strawdin'ry wise person!" growled Rabbit disgustedly. "You want drink nothing but white wine till you sick!"

But when Morden came alongside by jabbing strenuously at his hack's flanks Rabbit refused to continue his philosophical

remarks for the "white wines" benefit. He smoked placidly, listening to Eileen's version of his remarks.

Much to Seagrove's disgust Rabbit kept them going steadily until noon, avoiding every sign of a village or a hamlet. At length, within a sheltered dell carpeted with flowers blue and white, he consented to call a halt and to provide his clients with boiled chicken dragged from the recess of a saddle bag wrapped up in a dirty paper.

Sheer hunger drove Seagrove to violate his restaurant instincts; after which contentedly he went to sleep in the sun.

However, Rabbit was as cruel as the Moor is reputed to be, for he permitted them but a brief half-hour, stating as the reason that one never knew in Morocco when wild men were about to materialize; yet he persisted in remaining as obscure as ever regarding the time of their arrival in Tangiers.

They were on the road by a few minutes after one o'clock, winding down another long valley. Toward four, when Seagrove had begun to protest that they halt for the night anywhere, even under the nearest tree, they rose to the ridge of a saddle in the hills and saw, far-away, the blue sheen of the Mediterranean, misty in the drooping sun. Away beyond a distant hummock was, Rabbit assured them, the white roofs of Tangiers.

The assurance served, at any rate, to encourage Seagrove to bear the indignities of his aching body for yet a few more hours, and acted as a tonic to Eileen, who worked off some of the youthful energy evoked by the early prospect of a real bath by drumming at her steed's bony flanks until her unaccustomed heels were sore.

At last, as Rabbit had promised, a distant glint of white heralded the approach of the real bath so ardently desired by Eileen. But upon the immediate left, clear white in the sun, was a circle of tents having a larger one in the center.

"*Mehalla*," said Rabbit, in answer to Eileen's question. "Soldier man b'long Sultan." And jabbing at their mount proceeded to edge seaward, adding: "Him no good for 'fidel!"

"Why?" demanded Eileen.

"Soldier said, he like womans. P'raps he want to come look for you. No good."

"Oh!" exclaimed Eileen, and forthwith glanced apprehensively toward Morden and her father some way back on the trail by reason of their slower beasts. Scarcely had she suggested waiting for them than things began to happen in a hurry. The first was the appearance of a body of horsemen at a gallop over a ridge to the right from the opposite direction of the *mehalla*.

"What are these people?" demanded Eileen uneasily.

"Ibn Ben Ghali (sons of Ben Ghali)," muttered Rabbit, and as she felt a movement behind her he added: "Too much wild man—run away. Too much make fight. You sit still, be good girl. Bimeby Rabbit come look for you!"

To Eileen's horror Rabbit calmly slipped over the rump and she saw him running like his namesake as the cavalcade of strangers bore down upon her. She was nearly overwhelmed by the onrush of the horsemen, who split into two groups as they approached her, one party making for the two Americans seated on their mounts, vigorously cursing their escort, which was following hard in Rabbit's wake.

The sight of the wild, hawk-nosed faces jabbering at her angered her into action. She glanced behind to see her father and Morden surrounded. Then, desperately, she leaped off the animal onto the ground.

A harsh order ripped from the leader, a young man with fierce black eyes and beard, and a young tribesman spurring his horse forward, bent over, and literally snatched her from the ground and heaved her across his saddle-bow.

She screamed and kicked furiously, but the powerful arms held her and the fellow's coarse jelab choked her mouth as she was borne off at a gallop.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE HAREM.

THE wailing notes of the muezzin floated on the warm and orange-scented air of a courtyard centered by a playing fountain, the basin of which was made of

tiny blue and white tiles, through a glassless window, shielded by red and blue iron filigree into a cool, lofty room where, upon a pile of cushions upon a huge mattress in a corner, lay Eileen; an Eileen whose long, flaxen hair was thrown tempestuously across a pillow, whose stained traveling dress was strangely changed for a kaftan of deep blue.

After the first violent struggle to resist her kidnaper she lay still, finding herself held roughly upon her face across the creature's knees. She listened; even attempted to catch a glimpse of what had happened to her father and Morden; feared to hear the reports of rifle-shots which would intimate a possibility of death to them.

But above the thunder of the hoofs no such sounds reached her. Unfortunately her head was toward Tangiers, so that she had no opportunity to look down the trail. Presently her captor pulled up to a walk and said something in Arabic which she, of course, did not understand. The gallop of other hoofs came behind her. Some of his companions, bearded men in white jelabs, surrounded them, talking excitedly.

Recollecting that Rabbit had said that her captors were "ibn Ben Ghali," sons of Ben Ghali, the bandit, Eileen could not understand why they were taking her to the *mehalla*; for quite naturally she imagined that a brigand would take every care to keep away from agents of the government. What then could be about to happen? A wild idea fluttered that Rabbit had lied, that perhaps, after all, he was a brigand, too, and that these men were soldiers who had rescued her from his clutches and were about to restore them all to safety.

But such wild surmises were quickly slain. Eileen, as most inhabitants of a civilized country, had no conception of the state of the land of the Moors for many centuries; had no idea that the famous Ben Ghali, successful brigand, could have made a political deal with the present Sultan by which he became a governor of a province of Arzila with all the perquisites appertaining thereto, an official position which did not in the least prevent him from exercising his natural genius as long as the Sultan or some officials near to him were suitably rewarded.

So they continued until she saw at close quarters the circle of tents which Rabbit had told her was a *mehalla* of soldiers. Still holding Eileen on her face across the pommel of the saddle as if she were a bundle of fagots, the man cantered through a group of soldiery, wild-looking people in ragged red tunics and tattered, baggy trousers of blue, and across the intervening space to the large tent in the center.

Here he made her dismount by the simple process of pushing her off. Upon her feet her first action was a swift glance in search of her people. She caught a glimpse of her father and Morden upon their own mounts, which were being led by Moors. A gruff voice bade her to do something, and a hand gripping her by the arm half dragged her into the tent, where in the shadow she saw, squatting on a great rug beneath an immaculately wound rozzah to his high fez cap of the makhzen (government), the black beard and bright eyes of Ben Ghali.

He eyed her quietly and mumbled something. Her captor, the young man with a handsome black beard, clutched her shoulders. Eileen wrenched her arm away, exclaiming angrily:

"Don't you dare to touch me!"

The man grinned amiably and pointed to the rug for her to sit down. She threw up her chin and shook her head, whereat he spoke to the old man, who responded gutturally. Again he looked at her insolently, grinned; then himself sank cross-legged, and taking no notice of her began a long conversation with the old man.

Eileen glanced behind her trying to see through the tent door. Swiftly she sprang and lifted the flap. But outside stood two soldiers who eyed her hungrily. She stood irresolutely, listening. The one-eyed interpreter was not to be seen. The two men continued their discussion unperturbed.

At length the young man rose and indicated that she precede him. She obeyed, glad to get out, and glanced around hurriedly. There was a group of horsemen near the outer tents, but she could not distinguish her father or Morden. Although unable to comprehend how a brigand could be a high officer in the army, Eileen began to hope that she would soon rejoin her

father and Morden, to be held prisoners once more until the ransom was paid. Perhaps the amount would be increased, but that was all.

But when her captor gestured for her to mount the horse, she became alarmed again. "No! No!" she cried. "I won't!" He made as if to pick her up. She obeyed hurriedly, with a wild idea of galloping off as soon as she was in the saddle. But she was not given the opportunity, for the fellow scrambled with great agility in spite of his robes up behind her, and grabbing the reins started the animal off at a sudden gallop.

As they passed through the lines a frantic desire to warn her father urged her to scream, hoping that he would hear. But immediately a firm, large hand shot up to her mouth and pulled her back upon the man's shoulders. As soon as she ceased to struggle he let her go. Eileen was both mighty angry as well as frightened, but she remained quiet.

The sun was setting as they breasted a rise, and the earth and mountains were tinted in strange hues of blue and gold from the pageant which streamed across the arc of the skies. Once, just as the twilight was fading to the depth of night, in a twist of the road, she contrived to win a glance down the trail.

She saw distinctly a group of horsemen following, but whether Morden and her father were with them she could not determine. So that ride continued hour after hour, galloping, cantering, walking; cantering, walking, galloping, with the warm breath of her captor fanning the back of her neck.

Terrors that he might kiss her, might embrace her, hovered as grotesquely as the night shadows in those hills. Now and again the yelping of dogs marked some village that they were passing which she could not see. Thirst and hunger afflicted her, but she could not ask, nor did she so desire to do because of those vague fears.

And over and over to the *clap-clap* of the horses' hoofs ran alternating queries as to the fate of her father, and lover, and her own. At last, as they were cantering down a slight incline, a dim vision of misty ex-

panse ahead was materialized into some city by that strange, eery cry which came floating on the still night:

"Allah il Alla-h! La ilaha il Alla-h! wa rasoo-l Mohamm-ed!"

Eileen shuddered. Suddenly she felt rather than saw in that chant the soul of something, of these people perhaps which neither she nor her race could understand. Presently they came to a huge tower where armed creatures moved with dim lanterns in medieval fashion; gruff voices spoke as men-at-arms; and they clopped in stately measure up a cobbled street to another forbidding door.

Within she was handed over to a voluminous negress chattering volubly, who led her into this room where now she lay. In the great, tall doors had stood the slave in the light of a candle lantern, glass-domed in blue and green, silhouetted against the gleam of stars seen through foliage and cut in two by a misty flat roof, jabbering some requests or commands, Eileen did not know which. Tired, aching, hungry and fearful, did not care; but, turning from her, flung her weary young body upon the mattress to fall into the sleep of utter exhaustion.

She was awakened by a hand pulling at her shoulder. Eileen blinked and stared. Some moments elapsed before she realized that the stout negress in front of her was not the figure of a dream. She sat up at the jerk of reality.

The slave smiled good-humoredly, muttered unintelligible words, and began to pluck at the buttons of Eileen's coat. The action seemed to clutch in a vague panic at her heart. She snatched at the black fingers and shrunk farther back upon the mattress.

The slave gabbled volubly, and pointed to a pile of bright-colored clothes upon the floor in amused explanation. Eileen shook her head, merely understanding that the attendant required her to change into Moorish dress, a suggestion that was filled naturally with alarm.

For a moment the slave appeared nonplused, grinned and jabbered good-naturedly. More determinedly than ever Eileen shook her head again, and cuddled up apprehensively upon the divan. The woman seemed perplexed; gabbled more. Then, as

if struck by a new idea, she moved away, beckoning to the prisoner, pointing without.

More from curiosity than anything else, Eileen scrambled off the mattress to her feet and followed to see what the woman wished to show her. The slave appeared more amused than ever; laughed and danced ahead along the outer veranda with a queer, shuffling gait. Eileen followed wondering.

Past the plashing fountain with the blue tiles the woman led her and at a gaily painted door and made obvious signs that the quest was ended.

Hesitatingly, but with curiosity still the more aroused, Eileen obeyed her; peeped within, and saw a cool, whitewashed room containing a replica of the blue-and-white tiled pool—a bath-house!

The slave was quick to observe the flush of delight on Eileen's face. She grinned more extensively than ever, and beckoned with enthusiasm. Eileen glanced around without. The fountain sparkled in the morning sun, percolating through the orangery; not a body was within sight. The sleep had refreshed and given her some of her natural, reckless courage. Why not? She most ardently desired—and most needed forsooth—a bath. The water looked so clean and cool!

She nodded. The slave spattered gutturals, and applauded. Eileen pointed to the door. The slave disappeared. Swiftly Eileen disrobed. Just as she plunged into the delicious cool of the water a movement startled her. In the room was another slave, a slim, brown creature bearing a bronze bowl.

"Go away! Go!" exclaimed Eileen.

But in reply the young slave explained her presence by the vision of a real cake of soap. For the moment Eileen was conquered! The slave chattered and disappeared. But when, glowing with the refreshment, Eileen emerged, she found to her anger and dismay that instead of her European clothes was a pile of outlandish robes—trousers of emerald green—queer gowns of cobalt blue!

For a few moments she stared, aghast; she was angry and fearful of what the success of the trick portended, and had a queer misgiving, an uncertainty of her courage;

as if the purloining of her own clothes had stolen some virtue from her. And yet the well-being resulting from the long-desired bath and the flow of health and hunger nerved her, and in some measure gave her sweeter optimism.

Only partially conscious of the conflicting emotions, she snatched angrily at the unaccustomed clothes, almost annoyed with herself for the squeezing out of a grudging delight in the wonderful colors.

Shoes there were of the softest leather, vermilion, decorated with gold needlework; various strange undergarments like night-dresses, yet beautifully embroidered. As she crouched, examining them, a giggle startled her. She glanced around.

The young slave stood there with a mischievous grin on her pale brown features. Hurriedly Eileen scrambled into the green trousers, turned, and indignantly demanded her own clothes. The girl expostulated volubly and picked up the Moorish clothes as if to vaunt their beauty.

Half angrily, yet half amused, Eileen permitted the slave to dress her, reluctantly admiring the cool comfort. The slave produced a comb of ivory and persisted in arranging her hair, and afterward intimated by gestures that breakfast awaited her.

Thus it was that Eileen came to be lounging upon a Moorish divan, eased in body and logically in mind by the physical relief and the ignorance of the meaning of the preparations; for she was inclined to argue that captors who were so considerate could not mean any serious harm; even change of treatment from the dirty tent was not fraught with the ominous portents for her that it should have been. Physical comfort and relief tend to optimism for a time, at all events. Later the impossibility of discovering anything definite, of even gaining a hint of what her captor's intentions were and of the fate of her father and Morden, began to have an exasperating effect.

Some time in the afternoon, she guessed, for her watch had disappeared with her clothes, the young slave reappeared and beckoned her to follow. Eileen obeyed; this time without demur, not so much because she wished, but merely because action of any sort was better than anxious idling.

Walking across the sun-bathed courtyard, her eyes were so blinded by the glare that when she entered another room she was only aware of movement and chatter. Then out of the mists resolved a group of women around her chattering as excitedly as a cage of monkeys.

There were seven women; each and every one in the brilliant plumage of the harem; five of them were dark and swarthy, but the other two, to Eileen's astonishment, were as blond as she was, one with Saxon hair of flax and the other a real Titian red.

Bewildered by the unintelligible questions which were flailed at her Eileen backed against the young slave, who stood most resolutely in the doorway. Her person seemed the object of the incredible excitement. Each and every one of the women smiled or laughed in what was obviously the most friendly and reassuring fashion, and at the same time those who had succeeded in crowding the nearest to her did not hesitate to finger her robes with itching fingers; even poking the flesh of her neck and face, twitching at the strands of her long hair amid a hurricane of swift remarks.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Eileen at last, exasperated by these extraordinary attentions; "for mercy's sake, what is the matter with them?"

The outburst provoked was unmistakably a gale of applause. The women laughed and giggled and chattered more furiously than ever. The eldest, a swarthy woman apparently, as far as Eileen could judge, of about forty years old, spoke very slowly and impressively and gestured toward the interior of the room, evidently inviting her solemnly to the party.

Eileen glanced in the direction indicated. She saw that the affair was indeed a tea party, for upon the floor, deserted in the excitement by all the ladies, was a great silver-tray loaded with tiny glasses of lacquered gilt around an enormous silver teapot, a great silver cube of white sugar and a bundle of green mint.

After the first astonishment Eileen perceived that she was being invited to take tea with the ladies of the harem, the wives of goodness knows how few men! Wondering still more at the extraordinary treat-

ment, she permitted the chattering and giggling women to herd her toward one of the mattresses set along the wall and squatting as well as she was able in the native manner she became prepared to act the part of the guest as well as she could guess was conventional, becoming more and more reassured that her hostess, although strange, had no evil intentions behind the courtesy displayed.

So interested indeed did Eileen become in the manners and customs of the women who so evidently meant to be hospitable to a degree that she almost forgot that she was an American girl held to ransom by a notorious brigand, and kidnaped again by rough soldiery, together with her father and lover; indeed, so different was her environment, emphasized by her clothes, that she rapidly gathered an impression of unreality as of the "Arabian Nights," a fantastic dream in which everything was assured of being perfectly correct and rather disappointingly matter of fact when one should awake to find the maid with the morning tea.

The tiny lacquered glasses of tea she discovered were scaldingly hot and sweet. The first rash attempt to drink was greeted with a gale of delighted screams. Cakes there were of curious aromatic flavors as sweet as candy, enough of which was pressed upon her to satisfy a greedy elephant with a sweet tooth.

All these social performances were accompanied by a swift chattering, of which, of course, she could not understand a word. Eileen studied with interest the faces about her. The swarthy eldest woman who seemed to be the principal hostess had bright, intelligent eyes, rather like a cunning bird; in the others as Eileen reviewed them was nothing save empty prettiness, doll-like, except for the woman with the Titian hair, who was about in the twenties, whose features and expression were undeniably intellectual.

Yet as Eileen sat there she was conscious of a vague something which she could not analyze; a "thing" it seemed to her that each and every woman there knew well and thoroughly, and rejoiced in the knowledge.

And, curiously, Eileen was equally aware

that she resented the fact that she did not also know. This glimpse into an Oriental harem, naturally stimulated enormous interest in an American girl who, as she sat there endeavoring to be friendly to these very friendly women, was distressed by sensations of irrefragible superiority and yet—she was conscious of that irritating sense of lacking that mysterious "something" which each and every one of them possessed as by a birthright, and moreover unconsciously gloated over, as if flaunting before her an invaluable secret of which she had been deprived.

Lulled by the sense of security inspired by the hospitality of these women, Eileen forgot the wildness of the country, and her anxiety regarding the fate of her father and lover; was so soothed or perhaps so interested by these alien experiences that even when they were abruptly interrupted by the harsh guttural tones of a slave announcing some unintelligible order, Eileen was not conscious of anything save a rapidly developing curiosity.

The women chattered and laughed as pleasedly as children summoned to a school treat, and rising, beckoned to her to follow them, the eldest woman with the eyes of a very intelligent child mothering her from an outburst of giggles from the others.

Outside upon the terrace Eileen was somewhat startled to see two enormous black men girt with great simitars, the scabbards of which were silver and the handles studded with what appeared to be largely and crudely cut gems. Conscious of a faint terror, she permitted herself to be grouped with the others in a bunch and herded by these two great eunuchs through the orangery out into a larger garden, of which she had not suspected the presence.

The sun was setting, and as on the previous evening at this time of year the skies were a flaming arc of smeared rainbows, illuminating everything upon earth with the glory of their being. The garden beyond was full of rank grass, amid which grew, in luxurious profusion, masses of wild flowers, blue, scarlet and white. Through this enchanted garden passed Eileen in the company of the women, vividly interested and wondering where they were going.

Beyond a dense clump of flowering bushes burst suddenly the patio of another house, the white walls of which were rose, and the shadows deep purple. Upon a terrace tiled in the inevitable blue and white, squatted upon rugs, was Ben Ghali; beside him was the young man with the handsome black beard, and another middle-aged man. Before them were the remains of a feast: great joints of beef in huge wooden bowls; platters of sweetmeats and lacquered glasses were being borne away by coffee-colored slaves. Great lanterns of talc, with domes of blue and green, glowed against those purple shadows.

As they approached the lordly males Eileen was conscious of a distant infraction of her dignity; a sudden and imperative desire to break away from the group possessed her. She stopped. The women, whose eyes were upon the men, swept on.

A guttural exclamation brought her to the realization that one of the black creatures was immediately behind her and that the grin upon his face was more menacing than the glint of the simitar in his hand.

A violent desire to assert her rights was drowned by the environment of her clothes, the giant guard, the colored lights glowing in the purple shadows upon the bearded men, and the docile, robed women. Protesting to her injured self Eileen followed her Oriental sisters.

Speculating vaguely why she had obeyed, and still conscious of the dream effect, she imitated the others in squatting according, apparently, to unintelligible orders, upon the terrace. She discovered herself to be in the center. From the shadows rose unexpectedly the sound of music, the strange wailing in the Arabian minor key. The bearded men sat so still; motionless; seemingly so indifferent to the presence of the women that their attitude again reassured her. The warm darkness closed down like a perfumed tent upon them. Above the twanging rose a mournful voice full of satiated desire, longing for the power for greater desires.

While she sat quietly wondering what was toward she was aware of an expectant jabber among her companions and a surreptitious peeping to the right.

Suddenly the rhythm of the music changed abruptly. A ghostly figure materialized from the shadows into a dancing girl in the faint glow of the encircling lanterns.

The dance began with a series of slow postures gradually working up in speed until the girl was a whirling being of passionate suggestion. At first Eileen was rather charmed with the supple grace of the girl and her wild agility; then she became startled, not at first comprehending. Then she knew that she was witnessing one of the favorite Oriental dances which, rather to her surprise, appeared to excite the women more than it pleased the men, for the latter, except by guttural words of applause, exhibited no emotion.

At the end of the dance, apparently in a state of exhaustion, the girl threw herself upon her face at the feet of Ben Ghali, who appeared to compliment her and to bestow some form of present. Then, bowing, the performer withdrew into the shadows.

Immediately a tempest of tongues broke out. Young negresses appeared, bearing wooden bowls of sweetmeats. After they had gone, a loud yell startled Eileen, but appeared to amuse the women, for they all giggled delightedly. Then with another screech a queer figure appeared running upon hands and feet, barking loudly in imitation of a dog. Before Ben Ghali the jester, denoted by a stick with an inflated bladder attached, sat up on his haunches and bobbed and crowed violently.

A gust of delighted giggles greeted this effort. Whereupon the clown turned about and began to "he-haw," kicking up his heels ludicrously. In the glow Eileen saw that the face of the creature was smeared with red paint or earth, with a crude blue eye painted upon the forehead; on the bald or shaven head was a tall, red cap with an enormous blue tassel. A very dirty, tattered robe of the mendicant covered the clown's body, from which protruded green legs. At an abrupt command from Ben Ghali the jester wheeled swiftly and pretended to fall upon his face.

"'Tis the fool come to do homage to mirth!" shouted the young man.

"'Tis a fool come to do homage to

fools!" retorted the clown, and earned a gust of giggles and a guttural laugh.

"Sing us a song, O fool!" demanded the young man. Immediately the clown began to howl dismally. "Nay, where is thy lark?"

"The lark sings beneath the footstool of Allah—not at the feet of the sons of Iblees (devil)," squawked the clown. "But behold—the nightingale loveth the place of darkness!" and straightway he began to chant in a falsetto, smacking his rump by way of accompaniment.

As interested rather than amused in the antics of the medieval fool, but not, of course, understanding any of the words, Eileen sat apparently forgotten among the women, she became aware of the persistence of the fierce eyes of the young man fixed upon her. The ditty ended, the clown sat up on his haunches expectantly. From somewhere in the shadows a small bag of hassani (Moorish dollars) was thrown at his feet. The clown reeled out a list of extravagant praises of the host, and then, yapping like a village dog, he began to run about on all fours, beating the ground furiously with his bladder. Nearer and nearer he came to the group of nonsensical women.

Then, with a howl, he sprang in the air, landed within two feet of the girl with the flaxen hair, and began to spout a fantastic list of her beauties. The girl squealed delightfully, and the other women giggled delightedly.

Suddenly he struck her smartly over the head with the bladder, which brought a gale of screams and laughter. Then he pounced upon the dark girl. The third to be chosen, apparently at haphazard, was Eileen.

She shrank back apprehensively from the hideous creature, and felt her blood stop

as a familiar voice said swiftly, imitating a lover's whisper:

"Me Rabbit. Ben Ghali no like white wine. He wan' give you him son. Un'erstan', huh? You no let him drink. You get him goat, Ben Ghali! Un'erstan'? Rabbit come get you soon. Fine! Yessir!"

The bladder descended upon her head smartly, the clown yelped, and scuttled back, snatched up the dollars, and disappeared in the darkness on all fours, yapping shrilly.

For some moments Eileen was oblivious to her surroundings, endeavoring to digest the unexpected message. The obvious meaning of the warning chilled her. That was why she had been brought to this town instead of the tent again! Ransom had been abandoned because this young savage had fallen in love with her! Ugh! That was why they wished her to dress in Moorish costume, why she had been tricked into the bath; that was why she had been introduced to the harem, the place where she was detained to remain among her fellows!

Oh! Panic nearly forced a scream from her lips. A violent desire tore at her to leap to her feet and flee. But she knew she would not have a chance. "Get his goat!" What did the extraordinary Rabbit mean? Make him angry, of course, so that—Who? Ben Ghali, Rabbit had said. Why—and how? She could not speak and insult him.

Ah, somewhere, she recollected, she had read that the deadliest insult to an Arab is to pull his beard; hence the phrase which had originated among goatee-wearing Americans. Scarcely had she arrived at this conclusion than a hand upon her shoulder and guttural words aroused her to imminent danger.

The women were pointing toward Ben Ghali, who was looking toward her.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

It is good to laugh. And there's a laugh in every paragraph of

"Mrs. McPhee's Trespasser"

BY GEORGE FOXHALL

Author of "McPhee's Sensational Rest," etc.

Coming August 23

Resurrecting Alabama Slim

by
Wallace
M. Sloane



I.

THE story goes that an old traveling salesman who had "made" Nebo City once a month for twenty years retired in the late 80's to a farm in the wilds of Missouri. In his remote fastness the postman's whistle never sounded, nor book-agent nor bum nor wife's relative ever left track on its unfertile soil. Soon tiring of the solitudes of rural life, he resumed his position with his old company; and the first station at which he alighted was Nebo City.

No kind friend had told him what to expect. Amazed and incredulous, he looked at the electric lights, listened to the buzz of many industries, and watched the never-ending streams of people pouring hither and thither on the paved streets. Then he went to his room and put a bullet through his brain.

His father had departed this life by way of delirium tremens, and a maternal uncle had died in a hospital seeing small pink elephants and gigantic toads do battle on the revolving ceiling. The salesman himself had always dreaded a recurrence of the malady farther down the line. He was horrified to find it striking him so suddenly and violently, but he still had enough reason left to make good his premeditated exit. And he did.

The story, true or false, may illustrate the feelings of Alabama Slim on returning to the city after an absence of twenty years.

It was one afternoon in November that Alabama Slim, known in the days of his infancy and innocence as Bill Thompson, swung from a freight-car at High Point, two miles north of the county seat. He did not anticipate the two-mile walk with pleasure, but hick constables have an annoying way of investigating gentlemen's passes over common carriers. And now, of all times, Slim craved a peaceful if not a triumphal entry.

He was going home.

As he trudged down the track he might have been mistaken for a scarecrow come to life from a corn-field. Shoes that were long ago worn out by a New Orleans laborer somehow clung to his feet; his trousers had once adorned an Iowa farmer (now retired to Long Beach, California); his coat was of many pieces, but, unlike Joseph's, of one color—a dirty, ageless brown. Of hose, handkerchiefs, and lingerie his wardrobe was excessively shy, probably through the carelessness or dishonesty of the laundry. But neither raiment nor lack thereof weighed on his mind; weightier matters oppressed and confused him. He had left Dovie in a bad humor.

Dovie was an unreasonable woman.

Their series of petty quarrels had ended in a violent ruction. For the first time in life he offered to defend himself, and he was led to regret his impetuosity. A man physically unable to work acts unwisely in trying to prove it to his wife with a barrel stave.

He regretted his wife's termagant nature; he himself was of a mild, equable temper. His return to her partook of grim necessity rather than pleasure. He was over fifty years old, and too stiff to ride the "gunnels" with safety, and of late his rheumatism had been getting worse. Work he would not, and to beg too often meant going hungry.

Yes, it was better to go back to her; there was no alternative. He would bear with her tantrums tolerantly. Memories of her remote persecutions paled before the more recent discourtesies of brakemen, policemen, irate farmers, and vicious dogs. And in these hardships he suffered in vain; they were not followed by a warm bed and warm, regular meals.

But how explain his long absence? And his years of silence?

He had studied out a working excuse. Shame—shame and a broken spirit. He would tell her that he had spent all these long, silent years in a Western penitentiary, and he was too ashamed and crushed in pride to write. Dovie would believe it. She had too often said that he would end in the penitentiary; she had oftener said that he *should* end there.

And the kid? For an instant his gorge swelled with tenderness at the thought of little Minnie. A chubby, laughing, cooing little mite. Always wanted to hold his finger, and say, "da-da."

"Well, I've come back, hon," he rehearsed with a broken voice; "back from the bowels of the grave. Worsen than the grave, Dovie."

Already he was ravenously hungry, though only the night before he had eaten two whole onions and a turnip. And he wanted a drink. But Dovie had a washerwoman's antipathy to heart-gladdening beverages; he would have to lay off of the booze for a while, anyway.

So thinking in his jumbled, disconnected way, he approached the city. He sensed

a change, but he was too intent on his own troubles to notice his surroundings closely. Not till he stood on the corner of Main Street and Chickasee Avenue did the city rise up and slap him in the face.

"How'd I make this mistake?" he thought. "This ain't Nebo."

A glance at the signs convinced him of his error.

"Aw g'wan, g'wan!" Slim told the whispering air. "Where's the subway an' the elevated an' Central Park?"

It might be well to get the lay of the land before going home, and he strolled off down the street, looking for familiar faces. Faces there were in abundance—faces, faces, everywhere, but not a one he knew. And when at last he saw one that he recognized he hastily averted his head and passed on. For it was the face of a man to whom he owed two dollars, and he was in no position to remit.

Perhaps he could get his information from strangers. Edging up to a foppish youth before the new bank, he initiated conversation by asking the youth's name. The young man looked him over with disfavor before parting with the information that he was known at home as Pink Gibbs.

"Not Mr. Solomon's son?" Slim asked incredulously.

The young man was, and he saw no reason for denying it.

"Aw, g'wan, g'wan!" said Alabama Slim. "Pink Gibbs is jes' a little shaver, so high. That is, he was when I knowed him."

Up sauntered another gentleman, whom Slim recognized instantly. He was Hen Owens, Slim's boyhood friend. How many times they had shot craps and played poker and drunk wildcat whisky together Slim couldn't say—perhaps ten thousand. On him Slim fell with brotherly affection.

"'Lo, Hen! Don't know me, huh? Don't look like yer ol' frien' Bill Thompson, do I, huh?"

For a moment Hen looked at the uncouth apparition, and then tore himself from Slim's embrace.

"Tell it to Sweeney!" he grunted sarcastically and walked off.

Hen's failure to recognize him was a bitter disappointment. He realized that he

had changed. The years had wrought their ravages on him. A bristly graying beard helped to disguise his features, but did not hide the more recently acquired furrows and scars on his face. When he left he was inclined to rolling jowls and a flowing waistline; now he was reduced to sallow skin and a number of aching bones.

"Jes' the shadder of a man," he reflected.

Without further delay he turned to go to the shack to affect his reconciliation with Dovie. On the way he rehearsed his speech again, and now he did it with feeling. Self-pity and something of the cruelties of life harassed his simple, benighted mind. But he might have conserved his self-pity for a more opportune time. For when he came to the place of the shack, no shack was there. In its place stood a huge, two-storied hosiery mill.

Disaster followed disaster. On the streets, into which he was again rudely thrown by the disappearance of his home, he was approached by a "bull" and told to move on.

Slim obeyed promptly. But not content to let good enough alone, the officer overtook him and ordered:

"Keep on moving, bo; don't let me see nothing of you but your tracks in this town an hour from now."

Slim whined to himself, but he kept on moving. Disconsolately he trudged down the railroad track to the city limits. There he saw crowds of men emerging from two large frame buildings. He was not to know till later that they were the employees of the stove-foundry and the cooperage company, and that they were going home from their day's work.

Thinking it safe to linger a while, Slim paused and watched them pass by. Not one of them he knew, and even if he had known all of them he realized, with a shrug of despair, that the recognition would not be mutual. He would not be believed; even Hen Owens had said, "Tell it to Sweeney."

At last all were gone except a short, rotund person standing in the main door of the cooperage company. Slim—by the nature of his profession an adept at facial readings—appraised him as one who would make a good friend and a bad enemy.

"A big, frien'ly houn', if yer rub 'im right, an' a bulldog if yer rub 'im the wrong way," was Slim's estimate.

He regarded Slim with friendly eyes.

Slim was encouraged to speak.

"I reckon," he said lugubriously, "nobody aroun' here has ever heered o' Bill Thompson er his wife, huh?"

"Sho', pard," the fat one replied. "Bill were afore my time here, but I've heered of him. He's dead."

The news had all the effect of an electrical shock on Slim. He was reasonably sure that the man was mistaken, but all the same it gave him a creepy, chilly sensation.

"Reckon yer ain't mistaken?" Slim threw out. "This 'n' had a wife name Dovie."

"The same one, bo. I he'p bury 'im fifteen year ago. Had been in the river so long he'd bloated out'n the shape of a man, but his wife—that is, my wife, Dovie—reckernized him. I was boardin' there."

"Yer mean to say—do I unnerstan' yer ter mean—"

"There, bo; don't git excited. Was he a frien' of yores? You look all weak an' done up, bo. Want a drink?"

Immediately Slim came into the full possession of his senses.

"Yer mean water er a sho'-nuff drink?"

He followed his new friend around to the back, where the friend poked around in a pile of sawdust till he poked out a gallon jug.

"Find one in here 'mos' any time," he explained. "I'm fireman an' night watchman here. Name's Tom Trigg, but people 'mos' gin'rally call me Fatty."

"Yer c'n call me Slim Peters," said Slim, grasping the proffered bottle. "Well, here's lookin' at yer."

"Drink hearty, Slim."

And Slim did.

"So yer say Bill Thompson's dead?" said Slim, after a long, juicy suck at the jug neck. "Guess I'll walk over an' take a look at his grave. Yer don't care 'f I come back, I reckon?"

Mr. Trigg would not care; to the contrary, he would welcome Mr. Peters's company. His nights were long and lonesome.

And so Alabama Slim went to the old cemetery in as strange a quest as ever engaged the actions of a mortal man. He was looking for his own grave.

Slim was not proud or introspective; had he been so, his feelings would have received a mortal hurt. Weeds and briars, and not flowers, grew on his grave, which was sunken in near the head. This neglect was recompensed, however, by the tombstone, a yellow marble slab bearing the beautiful inscription:

WILLIAM THOMPSON.

A Good Husband and a Kind Father.

The beasts of the field seek their lairs at night,

The little birds they go to their nest;

He's gone to Abraham's bosom,

To his beloved rest.

—By His Loving Wife.

The phrase, "By His Loving Wife," in view of consequent events, savored of duplicity, but, all in all, he liked the inscription. Blind to the unconscious irony contained in "To his beloved rest," he thought it a beautiful line. His lachrymal glands were stimulated by the half-pint of whisky on his empty stomach into secretions of self-pity.

"Not perzactly gone," he corrected, re-reading the inscription; "but gone by proxy."

When he returned, chastened and saddened, to the cooperage, Mr. Fatty Trigg thought he saw in him a new man, and he marveled at the wonders of such a friendship. Fatty knew himself to be coarse, of the earth earthy, and without delicate sensibilities; but he was not without appreciation of qualities that he did not possess.

"Don't take it so hard, Slim," he begged. "All frien's mus' die. Me, I don't take things to heart. Take this dollar an' fetch us some oysters an' cheese, an' when you come back I'll tell you what may turn out good news."

While they sat over the feast Fatty unfolded his plans. The fireman and night watchman of the stove-foundry across the street was talking of quitting. It was a sinecure, too—two dollars a night for

throwing a few spoonfuls of coal in the furnace and patrolling the yard two or three times with a six-shooter.

"An'," Mr. Trigg dilated further, "we can lay out here on the sawdust together. The boys go on their jamborees here, an' sometimes fergit where they hide their whisky. I don't."

Once more hope sprang eternal in Slim's breast, but his mild eyes became dewy.

"I was jes' thinkin'," he apologized, "of pore Bill—Bill Thompson. He had his faults, but he was a mighty good feller."

II.

AFTER an Odyssey of wide wanderings and a return home to find himself dead, buried, and forgotten, and his wife married to another man, I am pleased to find Slim Peters, *alias* Alabama Slim, *née* Bill Thompson in happier surroundings. If he was dead, he was in heaven; certainly this was not the other place. He had returned looking for one thing, and had found another; but his luck was that of a man scratching in the dust for a lost dime and finding a diamond.

Nor had Fatty overdrawn the liquid possibilities of the place, which fairly ran in whiskies. Kegs of beer were also tapped Saturday nights by molders and coopers, and the two watchmen were always asked to participate.

And frequently, as Fatty said, celebrating parties forgot where they had hid their whisky.

For this Slim received the munificent sum of two dollars the night. He found lodgings in a shack back of the foundry, gratis, and the cost of his food, even for his prodigious appetite, was negligible. He soon became part of his surroundings—or, rather, they became a part of him. Many around the foundry kept chickens, which had a habit of laying in the foundry yard, and not infrequently the hens themselves strolled in and stuck their heads inside the furnace.

Friendship between the two watchmen soon grew into a David and Jonathan pact. If one wished to be absent a while at night, the other looked after his work. Each was a full, satisfying complement of the other.

Somehow, Slim felt stronger in the company of the coarse, materialistic Mr. Trigg, while Fatty experienced a kind of spiritual uplift in the presence of the dreamy, poetical wanderer, Slim Peters.

Sometimes in a wild strain of fancy Slim would think to himself:

"Now, couldn' I throw a bomb under 'im, if I was ter tell what I know?" And again, exasperated with the thought of his wife's perfidy: "If he hadn't been boardin' with 'er when they brung me in, maybe she wouldn' 'a' reckernized my corpse so quick."

But he kept his thoughts to himself. He was too well content to crave for a change in his condition; and, besides, his first appraisal of Mr. Trigg—that he would be of a violent, inflammable temper, if aroused—was correct.

It was well to let good enough alone.

He did talk, however, of women and marriage in general.

"Women!" Slim sneered. "I don't take no truck in 'em. They're ructious an' violent an' don't make no difference between throwin' kisses an' hammers."

"'Cause you don't know how to handle 'em," Fatty Trigg suggested.

"How?"

"Make 'em; that's how," the masterly Mr. Trigg explained. "A dog don't care nothin' for you unless you make 'im do, an' neither does a woman. I'd like to see my wife try to disobey me."

"What would yer do to 'er?"

"I ain't sayin' what I would do or what I wouldn't do," Mr. Trigg said non-committally. "But they's a passel o' willer sprouts growin' in the yard an' a passel o' barrel staves beyant the kitchen. But I ain't sayin' what I'd do, Slim."

No use of his saying. Slim knew, and he regarded with something like adoration the man who could subdue Dovie.

"I got a mighty smart stepdaughter, though," pursued Mr. Trigg with displeasure. "She's plenty big to help earn the livin', but do you think she'll turn 'er hand? Not her. Take in washin', or cook an' tidy up kitchens for the high-mucks? Phew! You'd think she was a millionaire. Thinks she's better than me an' her mother."

"Little Minnie?" asked Slim.

"*Little Minnie*, your foot! She's twenty-one, an' you'd think little if you was to see her. Been havin' beaux five years."

Slim listened to these family matters without batting an eye. Whatever might be his feelings, he had trained his tongue to play dumb on graveyard topics, even in his most violent sprees. Which, by the way, occurred with the regularity and frequency of Saturday nights.

Once, however, he was guilty of an indiscretion that might have been followed by serious consequences. Incidentally, it also saved him from a painful, nerve-racking experience on another line—but of that later.

On Christmas Eve the molders, understanding that Slim and Fatty Trigg looked after each other's jobs during the other's absence, offered Slim five dollars to clean up the dance-hall of the old lodge-room and build fires for their Christmas dance.

Fatty generously agreed to relieve Slim till midnight. Slim went, but before he went the sawdust pile emptied part of its treasures. The molders also, in a festive, Christmas mood, urged him to partake of their private brands; and Slim was too docile and courteous to refuse a request. As a consequence, he reached the hall in a mildly intoxicated condition.

He swept out the place, built fires, and then waited for the dance.

A while after dark the dancers and a number of observers and wall-flowers began to make their appearance. The entertainment was delayed a few minutes by the tardiness of the fiddler. When the large, one-eyed musician presently appeared with his trusted instrument, the dance began in earnest.

Slim had not been to a "tear-down" in over a decade, and this one flooded him with pleasant, far-away memories. Mixed liquors fraternized in him cordially, and each time he replenished the fire near the fiddler he was invited to help himself from the fiddler's own private bucket. He was inclined to be garrulous, but there was no one to whom he could talk. And so he continued to build fires and look at the dance.

Now, Alabama Slim was not immune to

feminine charms. To the contrary, his dreamy ethereal nature was susceptible to brief spasms of agony and delight in the presence of beautiful women, especially if he was in his cups.

As might be suspected of one of his meager anatomy, he secretly admired the large, stately type of the opposite sex. And just such a one was dancing before him now.

Slim had eyes for no other. She was well dressed, too—a superb, imperial-looking woman. Several times Slim watched her dance around the hall before he ventured to ask another on-looker who she was.

The answer knocked him flat:

"She's Miss Thompson."

"What's her first name?" asked Slim.

"Minnie," was the answer—"Minnie Thompson. She's Fatty Trigg's step-daughter."

For an instant Slim lost the power of speech.

That stately, exquisitely dressed woman his daughter—Little Minnie? It was inconceivable. Why, she had grown out of her class; neither he nor her mother had ever looked that way.

At first he felt a tinge of resentment, which was followed by a feeling of pride and tenderness. After all, to whatever fine company she might climb, or however fine she might dress, she was still flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. His own little Minnie.

At the end of the dance he caught her away from the crowd, going from one stove to the other.

He wouldn't have done it if he hadn't been drunk.

"Don't yer know me, Minnie?" he addressed her anxiously. "Course not," his jumbled thoughts rushed on; "I was jes' a little kid when you lef'. I'm yer father, Minnie."

The girl drew back, frightened and angry.

"You old drunken fool!" she quavered. "Get out of my way!"

Whatever her fright was, it was nothing to compare to Slim's. He had blabbed when drunk, and his nimble imagination

leaped to consequences. It might mean a horse-whipping for him; he even might pay for his indiscretion with his life. There was no plumbing the depths of Fatty Trigg's anger.

"Don't tell nobody," he beseeched Minnie as she brushed by him.

Just then he saw the fiddler hand his fiddle to another man and rise. Thinking that perhaps the gigantic, one-eyed musician's rising might have been occasioned by his foolish blunder, Slim backed out of the hall and struck a bee-line for the foundry.

Incidentally, his blunder and premature exit saved him from participating in a harrowing scene a few minutes later. He had no more than reached the foundry when the fiddler, a one-eyed giant with a lionlike reputation, laid out three men with his fists, shot out the lights, threw down his guns, and, armed, only with a bottle of castor oil, defied arrest, and forced officers and revelers alike to dance to his liking till after midnight.

The incident has no part in this story, except to show what the mild, timid Slim lost in the way of entertainment by his drunken gab.

The next evening he was made to tremble for his indiscretion. Fatty Trigg came into the yard in a bad temper, swearing volubly between clenched teeth.

"Y' know, Slim," he said, with embellishments, "my stepdaughter Minnie come back from the dance last night tellin' of some man sayin' he was her father."

"That so!" ejaculated Slim, changing color.

"Sho'. She told her mother, an' Dovie went into one of 'er tantrums. Said that she hadn't been married but once afore me, an' he was dead. You c'n see for yourself. Now what d'you think about that?"

"I think he were a fool," faltered Slim; "prob'ly drunk."

"Yep; Minnie said he was stewed. She didn't know him; never had set eyes on him before. He was a liar, Slim, whoever he was. Dovie's got a high temper, an' all that, but she's not that kind of a woman, Slim."

Slim was infinitely relieved to learn that the identity of the fool was not known.

"Well, I jes' guess not!" he agreed heartily.

So the matter passed off smoothly without loss of life or breakage of limb, but Slim resolved henceforth to keep a more diligent watch on his tongue.

Again things began to run smoothly, at times a bit monotonously. He had not yet made any friends out in town, and a few of his afternoons dragged heavily. In the absence of other late afternoon employment, he conceived the idea of cleaning off his grave.

"It's a shame ter let yer bes' frien's grave grow up in weeds an' briers an' sink in at the head."

To which Fatty Trigg, never tiring of his eccentric friend's "crazy notions," agreed, and proposed to bring some flower bulbs from home for Slim to set out on the grave.

And twice, armed with a shovel and a hoe, Slim went on his mission of love. He derived a peculiar satisfaction from the work—which is saying a great deal about work in connection with Alabama Slim. If no one else had any interest in keeping his grave clean and his memory fresh, he would do it himself.

He cleaned off the weeds and briers, filled in the breaks, and carefully furbished the tombstone.

The next evening Fatty Trigg came with some flower-roots and a handful of garden fertilizer. While Slim was setting out the flowers he was conscious of a vision in white approaching by way of the lower cemetery gate.

A second glance apprized him that the fair one was Minnie with a glass jar and a handful of blooms.

Leaving utensils and flower-bulbs on the ground, Slim bolted for the woods. He was successful in escaping undetected. For Minnie to recognize him might bring on complications.

"I been tellin' my wife an' step-daughter about you," said Fatty Trigg, "an' your int'rust in Bill an' his grave. They said bring you over to the house some time."

Slim declined. It might have been safe for him to accept the invitation had it not

been for his drunken *faux pas* at the dance. He might have difficulty in explaining to Minnie what he meant about being her father.

"Why not?" argued Mr. Trigg. "Dovie don't usually take to my company, but she wants you to come. Why can't you?"

"'Cause," said Slim wearily, "I don't take no truck in women."

During all this time he had seen his daughter only twice and Dovie a few times from a distance.

Through Fatty, however, he kept in touch with their coming and their going. Minnie, he learned, was soon to marry a young blacksmith recently from Chattanooga, Tennessee, and he inferred that her stepfather was not averse to the match. Minnie was only a dead expense to him. It seems that Dovie had developed a remarkably placid temper, patently through Mr. Trigg's discipline.

"Jes' a word spoke at th' right place, an' they'll always step," Mr. Trigg would say. (The "they" referring to women and dumb brutes.)

"But what d'yer do if they don't step?" asked the adoring Slim, craving an insight into his friend's method of dealing with recalcitrant wives.

"What do I do? If it's the right man says it, an' says it right, they *will* step."

"Well, I don't take no truck in 'em, anyway," summed the peaceful Slim.

And so passed autumn and winter and the halcyon days of early spring. Ah, but them was days! Lying on the sawdust, eating chicken and eggs without money and without price, drinking other people's whisky, and working a minimum amount for two dollars a night—that was the life for Alabama Slim. But even then, sometimes, his elemental mind would go trailing off after stars.

"Life's a funny thing," he would say while lying pleasantly intoxicated and looking up at the starlit sky, his mind wandering, Heaven knows how far, over his restless, ambulant life—on wives, daughters, and friends, and buried men still walking the earth with their wives' husbands. "Life's a funny thing. I wish I could say what I think, but I can't even think it."

Mr. Fatty Trigg guffawed aloud but good-humoredly, as a banker might laugh at a poet.

"You're a funny man, Slim. I don't see nothin' funny about life. Me, I'm used to it."

III.

EVERY dog must have his day, and they say that even a puppy should have an hour. The day of Bill Thompson and his friend Tom Trigg was sweet while it lasted, and they never once dreamed but it would last forever.

But all days, whether they be crowded with funerals or picnics, are followed by nights; and the night of the two watchmen was drawing near.

One evening Fatty Trigg came in with the information that the new bank was "busted." The news, so terrifying to many, did not disturb his or Slim's equanimity.

They had no money to lose, and a crash of all the banks in the world would not affect them. Nor were they agitated over the closing down of the other industries. So long as the foundry and the cooperage ran, and they received their two dollars per, with free fowl, eggs, and whisky, they had no kick at the world.

After a few weeks their wages were cut to one dollar a night. Both men were indignant.

Slim proposed to strike.

"You're a fool, Slim," spat out his practical friend. "It's outrageous, but they got us. If we strike, the's a hunnerd men ready an' waitin' to step in our shoes."

They grumbled about the cut and complained not a little of the scarcity of whisky. Still they remained. The mines, the rolling mill, the brick plant, and most of the other industries had closed down. On every side were beginning to appear scenes of desolation.

And not only in Nebo City: the whole country was facing the greatest financial panic in its history.

There were no more dances in Nebo City—there were hardly enough people left to dance. Whisky no longer came in barrels, but in short pints. Men who had held

steady positions at big wages were beginning to look for odd jobs at any sort of price.

The two remaining industries cut down their force to half; and the fortunate workmen were nervous and constrained, as men are who stand on uncertain grounds.

The cooperage company closed down in July. Fatty Trigg denounced the management roundly, but he made the best of the situation by staying nights at the foundry with Slim, with whom he divided work and wages.

Three weeks later the stove foundry paid off its hands and closed its doors. That was the last straw. The town was as dead as a door-nail, Hector, and the sailor's pet name for Hades.

The crash found the two friends in a poor condition to weather any prolonged turbulent panic. They had exactly three dollars and forty-six cents between them, which had its purchasing limits even in a day of high money and cheap commodities. By the middle of the week they were down to the price of a can of oysters, which lasted just five minutes.

"Don't worry," said Fatty Trigg. "Jes' hang aroun' the big ditch behind the foundry about supper-time, an' I'll bring you some eats from the shack."

At sundown Fatty showed up at the big ditch with a substantial meal in his various pockets. He sat with Slim while the latter ate, and then they strolled off to town together.

Twice a day after that Fatty Trigg carried food to his friend. Very often it was crushed out of its original form into the shape of Mr. Trigg's pockets, but little did Slim care so long as it retained its savor and sustaining power.

Whisky was not to be had; otherwise, for Slim, times were even better than during his work at the foundry.

Freed from his petty duties, he had nothing to do but sit and whittle at the street corners and play checkers with his old friend. It was a strange experience—sitting, playing, talking, day after day, with people whom he had known intimately all his life, and yet not one of whom recognized him.

Slim enjoyed the novelty of it; but however heated the discussion or close the game, he left abruptly at stated times and strolled over across the railroad.

"I gotta good un fer you, Slim," guffawed Fatty Trigg at one of these meetings. "Old man Noel Tipton was over to my house to-day, an' offered me fifty cents a day to dig ditches an' put up fences fer him."

"Well, yer goin' ter?"

"Listen to 'im! What d'you take me fer? After workin' at th' coop'rage for two dollars a night? Well, I guess not. Dovie wants me ter, but she ain't got no sense. She's a woman."

Soon after this occurrence there was a perceptible falling off in the quality, quantity, and frequency of Slim's grub. Slim bore the hardship stoically and supplemented his meager, irregular meals with occasional crackers, loose bananas, and other odds and ends of the grocery. When, however, things got so bad that they couldn't be much worse, he felt justified in remonstrating to Fatty.

He had no surplus flesh to spare through undernutrition.

"It's this way, Slim," Fatty Trigg explained apologetically; "times is hard, an' the's not many people havin' washin' done. B'sides, I think Dovie's suspicious that I'm carryin' some of the grub off."

Slim swore long and feelingly. He was not responsible for the hard times; certainly he could never be accused of affecting the conditions of the laundries. Why then should he suffer?

The next day he was at their trysting-place across the railroad before the time for Fatty's arrival. His soul was heavy within him. The merchants had resented his too frequent visits to their cracker-boxes, and were threatening him with the vagrancy law. And only the night before, while seeking a snug place to sleep near a man's chicken-house, he was shot at with a double-barreled shotgun.

And if there was any one thing for which Alabama Slim had less regard than for work, it was a shotgun in the hands of a careless man.

At last he saw Fatty Trigg coming. Even

at a distance there was something strange in Fatty's appearance. When he drew nearer Slim was filled with astonishment.

A more battered, bloody, black-and-blue specimen had never come under his observation. What had happened to Fatty, anyway?

Surely a mule had not kicked him—a mule could have hardly kicked in so many places—nor was it a circular saw, which would have sliced him up smoothly and neatly, without bruises, welts, and great, jagged, uneven gashes.

"Goramighty!" exclaimed Slim. "Goramighty! What's happened to yer, Fatty?"

"Huh, you ain't seen nothin' yet," said the dejected Fatty, removing his hat. "Feel thar, would ye?"

Slim ran his hand over his friend's head, finding three viscid knots varying in dimensions from the size of a large door-knob to that of a small goose-egg.

"She done it," Fatty explained.

"She who?"

"Dovie. She's a reg'lar tiger, that woman is. I was puttin' some victuals in my pocket for you when she caught me an'—"

"Did yer fetch 'em along?" broke in the famishing Slim.

Mr. Trigg paused in his narrative long enough to bring from his pocket about eight pennyweight of dry bread and an onion.

"That all?" Slim cried petulantly. "Why, that wouldn't feed a chicken, even if a chicken was hungry. The's fleas down to the foundry that would swaller that whole." And with a gesture of exasperation he threw the tiny morsels as far as he could send them.

"I'm sorry, Slim," said Fatty Trigg, "but the's all I could git. She caught me takin' 'em an' raised a ruckus. Said she's kep' up two husban's by takin' in washin', an' she didn't reckon she'd begin to feed all the stray tramps in the country. I never could stand fer no woman to get bossy aroun' me. I remembered the passel of barrel staves beyant the kitchen—an' here I am."

"What! She done that ter yer—Dovie did?"

"That's what I'm tellin' you; you can-

see for yourself. I ain't goin' back no more. I'm on my way to my other wife over in Georgy."

The news struck consternation in Slim.

"Yer ain't leavin' me, are yer? What 'll become of me?"

"You c'n come with me if you want to," invited Slim; "but it's two hunnerd miles, an' I ain't got no Pullman tickets. But after we git there, I don't know. I ain't goin' to ast no other woman to take keer of nobody excep' me."

In his present condition Slim couldn't have walked ten miles, and even if he went he would be none the richer there without Fatty's patronage.

Sadly he bade his friend good-by and watched him trudge off down the track.

He was afraid to go back into the town; the terrors of the vagrancy law had taken a strong hold on his imagination. For a while he walked around the old foundry and then lay down in the big ditch at the rear. But even that soon palled.

The last cell in his aching body was crying for food. He rose and went in search of the bits that he had thrown away in anger two hours ago.

The onion he found, but the tiny oblong of bread was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps it had been eaten by the birds.

It was then late November, and he shivered in his loose-fitting summer clothes. The rigors of winter would soon be on. At that thought he shivered again.

"An' me supposed to be dead an' decently buried!" he wailed. "O Gawd, why

didn't I stay dead—why didn't I stay dead?"

Indecision at times like these was not one of his weaknesses. He had made up his mind what to do; there was no other alternative compatible with his sense of comfort.

His road led by, but a respectable distance from, Dovie's house—and Slim was glad that the distance was respectable. Without pausing, he cast a glance at the house. In the yard was Dovie, her strong arms moving up and down in powerful strokes over a zinc scrubbing-board.

He continued his way to the court-house, where he entered the office of the probate judge. It was the dull season of a dull county, and the judge was sitting with his back to his desk, gazing out of the window and deploring the scenery.

"Well"—he turned to the ragged, shambling caller—"what can I do for you?"

"Jedge," whined Slim, removing his hat, "my name is Slim Peters. I been workin' down ter th' foundry nearly a year, but it's closed down now. I'm broke down in health, an' my rheumatiz is gettin' worse an' worsen. I ain't able ter work—never will be able ter work no more."

"Well?" prompted the sympathetic judge.

"Well, jedge," beseeched Slim, "I was jes' wonderin', seein' me in this condition, an' as I ain't never ast for office or favors or nothin' from nobody—I was wonderin' if yer couldn't fix it up somehow to git me into the poorhouse."

THE ROSE AND THE BEE

"**H**E loves me, he loves me not,"
The quaint old saying goes;
But that is the song of a daisy,
And this is the tale of a rose;

A rose that bloomed in the month of June,
A beautiful sight to see;
It flaunted its beauty to the sky,
And caught the eye of a bee.

The bee came down and kissed the rose,
All fragrant and wet with dew;
The rose looked up and loved the bee—
And straight away he flew!

Mary Alice Dandy.

Isle of Drums

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "The Butterfly Orchid," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

HEARING from Faroa, black mate of Captain Parks, of the schooner Huimanu, of the imprisonment of the latter and his daughter Lenna on the cannibal Isle of Drums, Aoba, Thad McKay, captain of the Mbelema, with Frisco Fred Sime, whom he had befriended, reached Aoba after an adventurous passage. Going ashore unseen with the help of Kekko, a Papuan trailer, they viewed a native dance from the protection of a tree, when Sime, seeing Lenna dancing alone in the moonlight, attempted to shoot a native who lifted her as she fell, swooning, to the ground.

But McKay was just in time to prevent Sime's foolhardy act, and, once more safely aboard the schooner, Faroa told them that Parks and Lenna were yet alive, simply because of the former's ability to teach Ponda, the wizard chief, his store of *teriki* (tricks). It was apparent also, from Faroa's tale, that Parks's store of pearls were hidden in the *demit* (effigy) of the dead king, Motonui, which Parks had fashioned.

That night, aboard the Mbelema, McKay, after mentioning one "Beauty" Bligh as a particular scoundrel who had done much to antagonize the natives, prepared his own *teriki*, looking to his visit to Aoba. And meanwhile, arriving at Hope Island, McKay's headquarters, in his schooner, Wave, where he marooned Pualele, a girl of whom he had tired, Bligh destroyed McKay's notices of his departure for Aoba, and set out for the Isle of Drums with his bestial mate, Larkin, with designs on Parks's pearls.

At Aoba, after an interview with Ponda, McKay and Sime, going ashore with a bodyguard, the latter impressed the natives by some marvelous shooting, McKay visiting Ponda in his devil-house and successfully impressing him with some flaming *teriki*, based largely on potassium, and promising him, later, to show him the wizardry of the burning sand. Parks was imprisoned somewhere about, and passing the tambu-house, at McKay's instruction Sime whistled a few bars of "The Star-Spangled Banner," which Lenna heard. Parks, also, had heard the tones of McKay's voice as he talked with Ponda. There was a glimmering of a plan in his mind, but it was useless without assistance. Finding a sharp edge of obsidian, he essayed to cut the cords that bound his wrists. Blood came, and he was forced to go carefully lest Ponda might see the wounds too soon; but he persisted, and at last the fastening was loose.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FEAST.

WITH swift fingers Parks loosened his ankles and then vigorously rubbed legs and arms back to good circulation. He imagined that his hands would be kept tied behind him until the white men had left Motonui as they had been so fastened for the first time this morning. Ponda would let him go without food or drink for a day or so without the slightest compunction.

They had had an argument about the manner in which Parks was dispensing knowledge, with Parks certain that the moment he could no longer show anything new in the way of *teriki*, nor convince

Ponda that he had something yet to show, his doom, and that of his daughter, was swift and sure. It was equally sure that he could show no *teriki* trussed in this fashion.

He had not been gagged. That was unnecessary. The first cry, and Ponda would have speared him. Did this Mak-kei know of his imprisonment? The uncertainty was torture enough to spur him to some action, however futile it might prove.

When they had bound him early that morning by the light of flaring palm torches, his jailers had carelessly flung aside the coil of spare sennit in their anxiety to be on hand to see the arrival of the strangers. This he found in the dark.

This story began in *The Argosy* for July 26.

He poked the severed strands from his wrists into a crevice of the lava. With a sailor's cunning he rebound his ankles, leaving a master-hitch that could be slipped easily in emergency. With fingers and teeth he managed to do the same thing to his wrists, the loop of the master-hitch under the control of his right thumb.

After he resumed his place, on some old mats, he contrived to thrust his lean legs through his arms, so leaving his hands in bonds behind him once again. He risked an examination, but he chanced that, knowing that his jailers would be apt to give him but a cursory glance in their desire to see all the doings of the new arrivals.

With his back against the corrugated wall of the tunnel, Parks was content to bide his soul in patience, knowing the time for an effort at escaping was not far off.

McKay and his party went on to the feast, and the two white men took their places under the green bower. They live well in the South Seas, there are *menus* ready for the plucking, the netting or the spearing that would make an epicure's mouth water. Wild oranges and shad-docks, bananas, breadfruit, and yams, coconut-puddings, the pith of the sago-palm, *taro*-paste, and tasty seaweeds for salads. Fish in infinite variety, pig and *poi*-fed dogs, turtle for steaks, though the New Hebrides natives are superstitious about the turtle, and its eggs are sacred. But there are the eggs of a bird that buries them in the sand, served scrambled, and there are pigeons.

Dainty eating, and usually well cooked in the steaming pits lined with hot stones and covered with wet mats, ovens that often see the flesh of "long pigs," the bodies of tribal enemies. Not by choice the flesh of white men, for it is esteemed too salty, and the islanders devour it principally that the indomitable spirit of the white may enter into their own *ego*s, *via* their stomachs.

But they are not dainty eaters. They use finger-bowls solely to cleanse their fingers of the stickiness of the *taro*-paste. To see a savage biting the heads off uncooked fish and gulping them down, to see him

tugging and chewing on an elastic section of squid, is neither edifying nor appetizing. And the sight of fierce teeth tearing at half-cooked pork under a blazing sun is revolting. It is hard to keep the mind on the fact that it is pork from the hog.

"I've seen some fancy sword-swallowing and guzzling in my time," said Sime, "but these chaps are regular boa-constrictors. Look at 'em swelling up with the stuffing they're putting into 'em. Why don't they wash their faces once in a while? Some of 'em have got a meal gone to waste on their chops. I'm done. I thought I was hungry."

"The fruit's all right, and the mullet," advised McKay. "Stick to them and throw the rest to the dogs. But keep on eating. Take it slowly. No use in offending them."

The dogs were there as scavengers in a snarling, snapping regiment. Likely at any time to furnish a meal themselves, they revenged themselves beforehand. And, everywhere, swarms of flies hovered. The guzzling went on and on. Once in a while a man would fall back, gorged to desperate repletion, and his fellows, or his wives, would drag him into the shade and knead his back until he got relief, usually in primitive fashion.

The supply of viands seemed inexhaustible, and the mats were strewn with fragments that the dogs snatched at and the flies buzzed over. Pungent *kawa*, chewed from the root of wild ginger by the women, was drunk freely, looking and tasting something like badly made ginger beer, but with the kick of hundred-proof whisky. Palm-wine and fermented concoctions of orange and pineapple, called in beach-English "*swipes*," added to the general intoxication, and the feast became a bestial orgy.

Wild and spasmodic attempts at music with pipe and drum and rattle brought forth efforts at lascivious dances, but the performers were too drunk to essay anything but a few suggestive steps and poses, and then, one by one, joined the growing band of snoring sleepers.

The sun was low before McKay saw his chance to slip away. Ponda, red-eyed and

drunken, upright from his loins, but with legs paralyzed by liquor, was making lewd advances to a woman who was anything but a prude. With Sime, McKay had spilled his liquor on the ground, and, as far as he could, he had kept an eye on the boys. Now he collected them, staggering but still capable of walking, and they got away unseen and down to the beach, where the boat was waiting for them.

"Another blow-out like that," said Sime, "and I quit. I've seen the wild animals fed in circus cages, but, believe me, they were kings and queens beside that bunch. I've seen a wild man fed his raw meat on a pitch-fork, and I've seen Bosco eat 'em alive, and they were also-rans. I'll take my chow aboard ship after this. I'm no dude, but I know manners when I see 'em, and pigs are gents compared to those gobblers."

CHAPTER IX.

BLIGH PUNISHES.

THE native sailor turned and grinned at Larkin.

"*Kapitani*, he tell me take everything belong along white Mary away his cabin. He speak, suppose anything I like, I keep."

"Let me see that stuff."

The boy promptly dumped upon the floor of the main cabin the few belongings that Pualele had brought aboard the Wave in her hasty elopement. A necklace of coral he had already appropriated and placed about his own neck. Larkin turned over the garments thoughtfully. He did not want to go against Bligh's orders, neither could he contemplate the idea of the girl's clothing going to adorn native women for the purposes of laughter and ribald vanities.

He remembered very clearly the first time he had seen Pualele, sweet and slender and charming in her frock of white muslin, a wreath of *pulmaria* blossoms about her shoulders, walking down an avenue of royal palms in a Tahiti garden, a vivid red parasol above her head with its coronel of glossy tresses, blacker than polished ebony.

"Something more you want?" he asked the boy. "Better I keep. Sometime maybe some more white Mary come aboard. Maybe she like."

The boy grinned again. He could appreciate this sort of thing aboard the Wave, but he still looked longingly at a white-backed hair-brush and a comb of turtle-shell.

"What for you want this?" laughed Larkin. "You not got wife, Imu. I put this all away. Instead I give you *tabaki*?"

Imu promptly extended his hand, and Larkin took twelve sticks of trade tobacco from a locker and handed it to him. Then he began to fold up the clothes and make a bundle of them. Imu went away, and Larkin took the things into his own cabin. He completed his parcel, bound it with paper and string, and put it away beneath his bunk, retaining one article, a photograph of herself that Pualele had brought aboard, and which had held place of honor in Bligh's master's cabin until that morning. It was a snap-shot that had been enlarged, and a good picture of the girl's alluring beauty.

Larkin was an older man than Bligh, but he had long been content to play jackal to the other's lion, to trail in the reflected glory of Bligh's deeds and misdeeds, the *nebula* to the skipper's comet. He admired Bligh's masterful ways with women and with men, his successes by land and sea, his seamanship, his daring, his good looks and energy.

Without his attachment to Bligh he would have been a third-rater, living as a third-rater. As it was, he got second-helping to most of Bligh's dishes, so far as flesh-pots were concerned. He made himself useful to Bligh in many ways; he was his dog, his messenger. Through Bligh he made more money than he would have otherwise, and he enjoyed what he fancied was high life.

To walk as intimate with Bligh into South Sea grogeries, or swagger beside him into the better hotels, spending and drinking, ogling the women, pointed out as "That's Bligh, of the Wave, and the chap with him is Larkin, his boss super-cargo," had been the meat of life's nut-

shell to Larkin, who was more vicious than valiant, whose instincts were to roll over on his back rather than stand up to a stranger.

Life with Bligh had given him a mock braggadocio that carried him through these days without challenge, but the years of knocking around as wharf-rat, mess-boy, cabin-flunky, kicked from ship to ship, that made up the early years of Larkin's history, had left their mark. Under his mask he always wanted to cringe.

And he was not so really evil as led to worship evil things as the fruits of success. He took to such fruits as a boy learns to smoke and, after a time, enjoys the habit. Stranded in the South Seas early in the game, Larkin's employers were coarse traders whose only joys were drink and women. Bligh was a refined edition of such men, and, when he gave Larkin a chance, the latter jumped at it.

Then he had met Pualele, and fallen in love with her—in a strange fashion for Larkin. Something had stirred within him, something long covered, unsuspected, a longing primitive yet not bestial, the swift desire for mate and home and children. It comes to every man, and it struck Larkin, the panderer, fairly between the eyes.

He spoke to her, and saw in her eyes the inclination to laugh at his squat figure, tempered with the respect due a white man, inherent in her native-tinctured blood. He spoke of Bligh, and her eyes had widened. She had heard of the captain's exploits, and, womanlike, she wished to try her fascinations on the man said to be so terrible and yet so handsome.

While they were talking, Bligh had come up, masterful, resplendent in his shore clothes, auraed by the record of his many conquests. He had sent Larkin away upon an errand, and the supercargo had seen the girl no more until the night Bligh ordered him ashore to bring her aboard the Wave, a foolish, loving Pualele, palpitant with tropic passion.

She had been merry at first, and Larkin had been her clown. She had used him and abused him, and then the same fate fell upon her as Bligh tired of her high temper and her demands that she be taken

ashore and married. In the evenings Larkin was denied the main cabin, but he had heard the tirade that preceded the smashing of the bottle across the table, and, when he had first seen the bruises about Pualele's wrists, he had wanted to murder Bligh.

The next morning she had told him she preferred the sharks to him, though he would gladly have taken her, have made an honest woman of her, built her a bungalow on Mount Tantalus, back of Honolulu, and given her everything she asked for.

She had stolen into his cabin and taken the pistol, a cheap one he had taken away from a drunken Kanaka, and which always lay in the rack with his razors and his comb and brushes—and she had shot him with it while Bligh laughed. His wound throbbed now, and his heart ached also at the thought of her marooned upon Hope Island, sadly misnamed for her predicament. He told himself that if he had guessed Bligh's purpose he would have fought for her—and knew that he lied to himself. His mood was that of self-pity, of semimaudlin sentiment that lacked virility.

Larkin had got up after the feverish night that Bligh had predicted, and, though the threat hung over him sufficiently to temper the size and number of his nips at the gin bottle, he had eaten nothing, and the liquor gripped and weakened him. It was simple for his mood to become lacrimose. Tears of sorrow for Pualele flooded his ducts, and he winked them away as he raised her photograph and, with a shake of his head, kissed it.

The next second it was snatched away, and Bligh, his eyes cold as a shark's, faced him.

"Drunk again, are you? Drunk and giving yourself away! So, that's the little game you were up to behind my back. And you gave her the gun and hoped that she'd do away with me, lacking the guts yourself?"

"No—no—Bligh! I didn't give her the gun—I swear I didn't! Why—she had no use for me—you know that—I—"

"Shut up! Where did you get that picture? Imu!"

The boy came, apprehensive, eager to shunt his blame.

"What did you do with that stuff I told you to take away?"

"Larakini he speak he like. He give me plenty *tabaki* all same."

"All right. You go topside, Imu."

"If it wasn't that I needed you, Larkin, I'd chuck you overboard and let you try to swim back to your lady-love on Hope Island. As it is, get up on deck!"

Larkin groveled while Bligh ordered Imu to take an inch hawser and, with the schooner thrown into the wind, dive and swim with it beneath the keel from port to starboard.

The crew of the Wave was twice as large as its navigation called for, and they were a rough crowd, gathered from Malekula, from Malaita in the Solomons, savages all at heart, held in hand only by awe of Bligh. To see a white man disciplined was to them a Circus Maximus, and they assembled in the waist and giped among themselves at Larkin's degradation.

Bligh was pitiless. The thought that Larkin had carried on, or attempted a *liaison* with his own mistress, the belief that Larkin had deliberately provided her with a gun, hardened him to break Larkin, to cow him absolutely. He still needed him, still intended to use him, no longer as a man, but as an abject slave. When Larkin clutched him about the ankles, Bligh thrust his knee so harshly into the supercargo's face that his nose bled.

Imu came up overside with the rope which was attached to Larkin's feet at one end, the other fastened securely to his wrists. Then he was borne, jerking, to the port rail, and thrown overboard, while the crew hauled on the line. Once it halted and, at Bligh's command, they eased it back.

At last Larkin's streaming, sodden, senseless body appeared, and was hoisted over the starboard rail and laid upon the planks. Bligh kept the Wave's bottom fairly clean, but, in those seas, shell-fish and weeds can cover a hull in a few weeks, and it was three months since the schooner had been hauled out. Larkin's clothes had been cut to ribbons and were streaked

with blood. His face was hardly human, smeared with green sea-moss, raked with shells. Bligh lifted one soggy eyelid and felt the wrist.

"Take him for'ard and pump it out of him," he said. Then turned and went aft to the companionway. And so down to his cabin.

Bligh had formed no distinct idea of what he was to do when he arrived on Motonui. He left much of that up in the air until he reached the place and saw the circumstances. Knowing nothing of the hiding of the pearls in the *demit*, he assumed that Parks might have hidden them somewhere in some place fairly easy of access.

He had heard of McKay's previous trip to a pearl patch that might turn out valuable, and that had brought him to Hope Island, figuring on horning in on the discovery if it was worth while, perhaps setting up a fictitious claim and backing it up with his superior crew of bullies. He had done such things before successfully.

Now he was after Parks's hoard. His misadventure with Lenna Parks did not bother him overmuch. He felt sure that McKay would meet with difficulties, and he knew he was not many days behind him. As a matter of fact he was just two days. He believed that his brains would show him some way of using McKay as a catspaw and raking out the pearls for himself.

He had once been in a position to do Sam Parks a favor in a matter of salvage, unasked by Parks, and he had done it because Parks was prominent and wealthy in the trade, and Bligh might some day be able to refer to it to his own advantage. He saw to it that Parks knew he had done this thing, keeping himself in the background.

The value of Parks's pearls had been often talked about and variously estimated. The testimony of those who had seen the gems appeared to place their market worth at well over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And the market was reviving with the conclusion of the war.

He had given a lesson to Larkin that he had long contemplated. In one moment of carelessness and another, due to Lar-

kin's familiarity with his affairs and constant presence aboard the Wave, the supercargo knew more than Bligh wanted him to. To discharge him would lead to resentment and gossip that might give both color and evidence to certain shady transactions.

But he was not quite ready to dispense with Larkin for general reasons. He was used to his jackal, to the man who would do his dirty work. Hitherto he had flung him a certain measure of reward. From now on he would use him through the fear engendered of a broken spirit. First and last Bligh was a bully, of the hail-fellow-well-met type, seemingly free-handed, hard-fisted only where he felt that force was his best weapon. But he knew that he was coming to the end of his rope.

Times were changing in the islands. There was talk of new government control under the League of Nations, and things that had been tolerated or ignored might now come under rigorous inspection and penalties. Firms like Burns, Phelps & Co., were in growing favor, and their policy of treating the natives fairly was being recognized as the best one. The groups were rich in other things besides the easily gleaned harvests of *copra* and shell and sea-slugs. The new government would exploit these matters of hardwoods, of valuable dyes and minerals.

And, with this new order, Bligh and the men of his caliber would have to mend their ways or get out. And the ways of Bligh were long past mending.

He was already under investigation for certain cruelties practised on natives, for the arbitrary use of the "strong hand" in ways that smacked of piracy. The uncertainty of the war, the careless years before the war, were over, and it was up to Bligh to make a final *coup* and disappear.

He had made much and squandered it. His chief assets now consisted of three schooners and a barkentine, some hazy rights here and there in pearl lagoons and masterless coco-groves, some few hundred dollars in trade goods, some credit—and no good will. In that commodity he had always been bankrupt.

His good-looking face grew mean as he

sat in the cabin and thought things out. The bags under his eyes grew puffier, and the lines of dissipation determined themselves. His eyes hardened as he thought of Pualele, and wondered whether she had deliberately encouraged Larkin. But he dismissed that. Larkin lacked initiative. A bolder spirit might have killed Bligh and deliberately gone back to port and stated that they had quarreled, suborning the native boys, who would any one of them swear to anything for a case of gin.

Then he laughed. It was a good joke on McKay, planting the girl on his island. He might be able to use that fact later to discredit McKay with the Parks. Cogged dice appealed to Bligh. And he smiled again as he thought of the torn-up notices that McKay had posted. Nobody else would be in on this deal.

He mounted the companion ladder far enough to thrust head and shoulders above deck level, and shouted for his mate, Atupa, a burly, surly devil from Malaita, a cannibal reformed only by change of environment, a good sailor by nature, boss of his fellows, and firmly convinced that Bligh was the representative of the missionaries' Satan, if not that actual personage. Bligh could think up more and craftier deviltries than Atupa, and the Solomon Islander respected him accordingly.

"How is the gasoline, Atupa?" asked Bligh. The man departed, and presently came into the cabin with a measuring stick in his hand.

His report brought a frown to Bligh's face, though he pushed a gin-bottle toward Atupa, who poured himself three-quarters of a tumblerful of the stuff and swallowed it without winking before he left. Bligh did not want to arrive off Motonui with his tanks empty, yet he wanted to hurry, and the weather was extraordinarily perverse.

Long periods of calm at that season were not rare. A skipper might drift for days on a heaving sea with his sails slatting, and curse as he saw a squall within a mile of him. Gasoline took the Wave across such gaps, but to-day was different. It was breathless, supernally hot.

Bligh took a look at his cabin thermometer. It registered five degrees above the

hundred, and the torrid atmosphere suggested twenty degrees more. The barometer showed no change, no hint of storm. He went on deck. The Wave was chugging over a sea of glass, the wide roll of it unbroken, viscous. Nowhere was there a sign of cloud or of wind.

Atupa came aft, showing his filed teeth in a grin. He was by way of being a dandy, in imitation of his skipper, and he had a row of cowries about his forehead, with brass rings in the holes he had stretched in his ear lobes. A beautifully polished necklace of Tredacua shells swung low on his chest, and shell armlets were sunk deeply in his flesh. He was quite naked, save for his ornaments, the Solomon Islanders hating the feel of cloth.

"That Larakini he spout all same whale," he said. "My word, I think one barrel of water he throw up. What we do now?"

"Chuck him in his bunk," said Bligh, "and have a boy open me a drinking nut."

CHAPTER X.

THE BURNING SAND.

SOME lay in his bunk, exhausted, while McKay prepared for the wizardry of the burning sand. He took his duck trousers and, with a seaman's neatness, ripped out the cotton pockets. Then he made two others, much longer, conical of shape, out of canvas. The bottom of these he did not sew, but closed with a puckering string, bringing the loose ends with his needle out by the seam of either leg, so that they would hang like short ravelings, unnoticed.

Next he made his mixture of chlorate of potash, mixing his granulated sugar with the oxyhalogen salt, and testing the product with his small vial of acid. Satisfied, he put the powdery stuff away in the tin box that had contained the safety crackers, and closed the lid tightly, to prevent any deterioration from dampness. Finally he lighted his pipe and went up on deck to loll against the rail and think.

The vision of the girl was very clear. McKay had not seen many white girls at close range during his trading days. Ashore

at Suva, or other settlements, he went about his business affairs promptly and put out to Hope Island with the least delay. He did not put up at the hotels the tourists frequented. Sometimes he glanced across the lawns at the dim-lit verandas where light laughter sounded from the airily-clad women, the fiery tips of cigars showed, and the clink of glasses proclaimed the presence of men who moved in different ways than he did.

He loved his island solitudes, the broad reaches of horizon, the ever-shifting, pearly masses of the trade-wind clouds, the storms, the calms, the flaunting palms, and the scented bush. Some day, he vaguely told himself, when he had struck his rich patch of pearls, when he had made his pile, he would strike out and see the world. But he knew that the glamour of the tropics had gripped him and would always bring him back.

Of the women with whom those of his own calling trailed on their trips ashore, he knew little, wished to know no more. There was no lack of manhood nor of manhood's full desires in McKay, but, until now, his work had satisfied him, and his sex-thoughts had been entirely visionary. The monotony of trading had not yet palled upon him, he had not tired of the little adventures, the spearing for fish or squid in the reef-pools, the hunting of a shark for its skin to use in polishing, the ever-present fascination of voyaging to little-known atolls and prospecting for pearls. Like the placer-miner, he always found just enough to lure him along in the hope of the big discovery—the perfect pearl.

Once he had gone up the Mambare River, gold hunting, before he acquired his island, but they had found nothing. But he had never been discouraged, and it was in a whimsy of optimism rather than the reverse that he called his little holding Hope Island.

Now, for the first time, sex really challenged. Lenna Parks, as she had danced in the moonlight, almost ethereal, yet, in the glance in which their eyes had met, eminently human; Lenna, with white limbs gleaming in artistry and modesty, with the glimpses of the moon upon her brown hair, gently gilding it, held more than his

thoughts. There seemed something in common between them, and, as he gazed across the surge of the reef to where the bush-clad hill rose black to the cleft mountain tops, he wondered if she, in the *tambu*-house, was thinking of him, waiting for him to come to her rescue. He felt that this was so, felt that when they met it would not be as strangers.

She was her father's pal, a girl sea-cradled—sea-bred, loving the same things that he did. No city maiden, delighting in the frivols of dress, of dancing, of the things he knew nothing of. Here was a maid who could stand by the rail on nights like this and understand and share the silences, the great spaces, who would love the winds, the stress of mounting seas, the gallant struggle of the ship, the skill of the man who handled it. Could take her trick at the wheel, too, without doubt; pore over charts and map out trails across the unexploited seas.

To her a drawing-room would be a cabin, the kitchen a galley, her boudoir her own special apartment with its spotless bunk.

He went further. He imagined her face, not pale and elfin as it had been in the moonlight, but quaintly vivid, aflame with life and living, looking at him across the table under the cabin lamp. There might be a real house on Hope Island, or, after the pile was made, on some larger land.

He drew a long breath and looked up to the Pleiades, sparkling high above him. The stars were all globes of gold aswim in the ether, not merely spangled on the curtain of the night. And he dismissed the vision. Lenna Parks was an heiress, and he an unproved adventurer. There was still his pearl lagoon. He had only tried one end of it. In the deeper water, twenty fathoms down, beyond the limit of any of his boys' powers of diving, fortune might still lie. But there was much to do yet.

The heat of the day was tempered, but the night was suffocatingly hot. The sea was flaming with luminous atoms. The reflection of the phosphor in the reef-breakers showed before they spilled their foam on the lagoon. The coral, partly exposed at the ebb, displayed a steady glow of lambent flame. It twisted about the sides of

the Mbelema in snaky coils of opalescent greens and violets. Back in the bush there was drumming still going on spasmodically as the feast ended. His pipe burned out and he found his pouch empty. It was time to turn in.

Sime was sleeping uneasily. McKay looked commiseratingly at the hollow eyes and sunken cheeks. The Californian's hair was wet with the sweat that covered his forehead, the sheet that covered his naked, wasted body was soaked with the perspiration of weakness. McKay shook his head as he picked up a string-hammock from a transom, meaning to swing it on deck between the mainmast and the stays.

"Game as they make 'em," he commented. "But you're up against a losing proposition, Fred."

Everybody aboard the Mbelema was up betimes the next morning, but no sound came from Motonui, no smokes were seen. The village was sleeping off its gorging like a many-stomached snake. Ponda had shown himself as much a glutton as the rest, and McKay knew there would be little stirring before the hour set for the burning of the sand—at high noon.

Faroa, rapidly recovering, begged to be allowed with the shore party, but McKay put him off, hesitating also as he sized up Sime's condition.

"I don't anticipate any especial trouble, Fred," said McKay, "but if anything should break loose, it's going to happen soon and travel fast. We may need some brisk action to cover us at this end. Will you take charge of the schooner to-day and boss the—"

"I'll boss nothing," replied Sime. "You are the boss, and I'm just a sniper. But I'm going where there are snipes, and you can lay to that. It's another rotten day, and you figure I can't stand the heat, so you're trying to kid me to stick on the boat. Nothin' doin', Mac. Call it mutiny, if you want to. Me and my little gats walk right along with you. We ain't goin' off till six bells, anyway. The worst part of the day 'll be over by then. While you're doin' your Salamanderino stuff, pull it off somewhere near a shady tree, and I'll be much obliged to you—but I'm goin' along."

McKay laughed and threw up his hands long before Sime had ceased spluttering his indignant protest. He couldn't see where there was likely to be much chance of things going against them so long as his experiment succeeded and he continued to retain its secret. It was only after he and Ponda got on confidential terms and they had the run of the village that McKay figured they could become really active in the rescue of the two prisoners. Still, something might break, and Sime's shooting would undoubtedly be a big factor.

At six bells they left the schooner, shot the reef, and landed dry. An upset would have been apt to spoil things, for the tin box that carried "McKay's mixture" was not waterproof. The palm fronds were still proclaiming the bush-path open. There was not much work done by any one in a native settlement after a feast, except when well-informed enemies took unfair advantage of the general somnolence and started a head-acquiring expedition.

McKay emptied the contents of the tin box into his two prepared pockets, and they made their way leisurely toward Motonui, through the *sing-sing* grounds, to the village proper. As they neared the latter under the hot sun, breathing the stifling atmosphere with lungs that seemed seared, the absolute silence struck McKay as suggestive of something more than mere sleep. He held up a warning finger, and they went ahead at the alert.

Suddenly the shrilling of a native Pan's pipes shrieked out in a weird staccato, penetrating the silent bush. McKay had reached the end of the trail now and peered through the leaves. The village was deserted. Far across its general square or gathering-ground, he could see the red and black and white of the Motonui effigy under the banyan-tree. For a moment or two nothing else.

Then something came prancing grotesquely from behind a cluster of grass huts, moving in time to the notes of the hidden Pan's pipes. It ran and leaped, its wide shadow tucked under it as it left the ground, looking like some antediluvian bird. It was the same *tataivututu* figure that had appeared on the *sing-sing* grounds

the night of their arrival. By day it seemed more ludicrous than impressive, palpably artificial with the conical mask and crudely painted features, the flapping ears and ridiculous beak above the long straw cloak that ended in two very human feet.

Yet, as the creature hopped and sprang, there was a decided suggestion of the original source of the design, the giant, wingless birds of Australasia.

"I'm glad I'm not Ponda," thought McKay, for he was sure it was the priest under the masquerade. No one else would dare to play the rôle.

As the thing came nearer to them it left little puddles of moisture that showed how effective a Turkish bath it must be proving. The life of a wizard was not all joy, though such antics undoubtedly helped to keep Ponda in trim.

The meaning of the performance was very plain. Under penalty of swift and horrible death the village was being ordered to remain within doors, not to even peep at anything that might be going on. To venture out while the *matemoa*—the bird of death—was abroad, or until the ban was officially lifted, meant literally that the inquisitive villager had lost his or her head. Ponda was not going to have the rabble see him taught magic by the white man.

The job was over. The Pan's pipes ceased, and the death-bird, much less energetically, cavorted away toward Ponda's cave. McKay looked at the narrow shadows of the houses. Noon, to Motonui, would be marked as the time when any shadow was least. It was close to that now, and he emerged from the path, followed by Kekko and three more rifle-armed boys, with Sime bringing up the rear.

Slowly they advanced toward the banyan-tree, and once more Sime puckered up his lips as they passed the *tambu*-house, its mats still closely drawn, the *tabu*-skull still aswing from the peak of the roof. This time he whistled "Dixie," not very loudly, but with a lilt and a thrill to it that must have cheered the heart of the girl inside—if she was inside.

Through the pillared root-stems of the banyan, as if they were South Sea hama-dryads coming from the heart of the great

tree, eight men advanced. They were newly oiled, and they had white cockatoo plumes in their straw-colored wool, white blotches on their faces, and a broad, red belt of paint about their chests. They were festooned with strings of dogs' teeth and knuckle-bones that their own teeth might have gnawed on. Otherwise they were stark-naked—the assistants of Ponda.

They ranged themselves about the *demit* of Motonui as McKay came leisurely up without seeming to notice them. It would not do for him to speak to any one less than Ponda without irrevocably losing his own *caste*. He chose the deepest patch of shade, and they disposed themselves to wait until Ponda should have shed his bird costume and adopted whatever fetish display he might select for the present occasion.

Presently he came, stalking arrogantly across the compound, blazing in the sun. Once more the hidden Pan's pipes squealed. In all the houses the natives cowered in abject fear. Spirits were abroad—with Ponda.

Ponda had used every inch of the brass and copper wire brought him from the schooner to add to the glory of his priestly garb. From ankles to knees and wrists to elbows his limbs were hidden by the shining coils from which the sunbeams broke in a thousand bursts of dazzle. The heat of it should have almost scorched his flesh. The plumes in his hair were red, and his body was striped much like that of Motonui's *demit*. His necklaces were made of human teeth, and, as wand or scepter, he carried the thighbone of a man ornamented with tufts of red. Like the rest, he wore no loin-cloth.

McKay went forward to greet him ceremoniously. Ponda's eyes glittered out of white circles painted about them.

"Have you chosen the stone?" asked McKay.

Ponda wheeled, his priestlings fell into line, and trailed him to where the top of a great mass of rock rose above the sand. Its top was flat, or nearly so, for a space of some six feet square. The sand about was the coral grit mixed with shells broken infinitesimally fine, the whole a mass of broken iridescence, painful to look at under

the vertical rays. Yet McKay looked at it with satisfaction. The preparation in his pockets would, even on close inspection, so mingle with it as to be barely discernible. And he had no intention of allowing Ponda and his satellites to approach too closely.

"Is it good, Mak-kei?" asked Ponda. There was a tiny twitch of a smile on his face, as if he had marked his cards.

"Any stone is a good stone," said McKay, wondering just what Ponda was up to, and walking casually over for a closer inspection of the boulder. There seemed nothing remarkable about it. There were no carvings. A fissure extended part of the top and down one side, two inches across at the widest part, apparently going down some distance. "Is it a *demit*?" he asked.

"It is the *demit*-stone of Tuakane," replied Ponda. "Tuakane, who could live as well in the sea as on land, in the river or in the bush. Tuakane, whose father was a shark. When we need rain we pray to Tuakane, we whisper to him through his ear," and Ponda pointed with his thighbone scepter to the crack in the rock. "And Tuakane always sends us rain. It cannot be hard for him to do so, for his *demit* is now in the water as well as on the land."

Ponda grinned as he propounded this seeming riddle, and McKay knew that the wizard had pulled some sort of a trick. Eager as Ponda was to learn new wizardry, he would be just as keen to mar the performance of Mak-kei or try to make it more difficult.

McKay stooped and ran his fingers through the coral grit. Three inches down the sand was moist. The *demit*-stone of Tuakane was set in a spring that lacked force or siphonage to reach the surface, but percolated through the subsoil. Tuakane had been named for the *demit* rather than the stone for Tuakane. The calling the fissure an ear was merely priestly jargon and the apt use of a coincidence. And McKay thought he was as good at that sort of thing as any Ponda.

The hot sun kept the surface of the sand dry, burning to the touch. With his ignition mixture once on the ground he could

easily have set it off with a burning glass. But its use would be too patent, not original enough. Ponda and his priests had seen burning glasses.

McKay had figured out his program, his little ritual, which was to be at once simple, lacking any attempt at hiding his actions, and therefore the more supernatural, and also effective. The fissure in the rock pleased him especially. He had not counted on anything of the kind, but he had hoped—and he had brought a stick of dynamite along, capped and short-fused, on the possibility of a gorgeous wind-up and a bang to emphasize his performance. Dynamite was not new to Ponda, but in connection with the rest of the happening he would not be likely to think of a final explosion as dynamite, but something far more unearthly.

McKay prodded here and there in the sand, and decided that the top-soil was quite dry enough to carry his chemicals without deterioration. He turned to Ponda.

"It will make no difference. You have seen me make fire dance on water. Now behold! And this is in the bright light of day. I want twenty peeled wands, a fathom or more high. If you bring them you will know that I have not put a spell upon them."

Ponda sent off two of his priests for the peeled poles, of which there were bound to be plenty in any village, used for *tabu* purposes. McKay strolled over to the stone wall of a hut-cluster and cut a bamboo cane, from which he proceeded to trim all the leaves but a tiny tuft at the top. He took some time to fix this tuft to his satisfaction, but, when the job was done, his little vial of acid was bound to the slender stem, well hidden by the leaves. He thrust the cane into the sand by the side of the rock, and left it there for the time being while the wands were being brought. He beckoned Sime to come over to him.

"When I start to march round this stone, Fred," he said. "I want you and the boys to walk with me, outside of me, as a cover, not too closely. I don't think there is a chance in a million of their getting on to the game, but we'll minimize it, and at the same time let them think they can see everything. So it'll be open order. I'm

going to have those wands stuck up in a circle and keep the audience twenty feet off. I'll tell 'em it's dangerous to get any closer, and before it's over they'll believe me. Take this." He pulled out a flaming orange silk handkerchief from the side pocket of his coat.

"Go over there and sit on the side of the rock by the bamboo. Don't shake the cane or you may loosen the bottle of acid I've got fixed there. It's firm enough, but go easy. Cut up this handkerchief into strips, and tie these strips on the bamboo, one at each joint. There's a stick of dynamite, capped and fused in the handkerchief. Take all the time you want to cutting up the silk and fixing the strips just right. And manage to get that stick of dynamite into the crack in the rock with the fuse up so I can get at it from the top of the stone. The crack is right by the bamboo. You get the idea? It's going to be the climax."

"Got you," said Sime briefly, took over the square of silk with its dangerous contents and walked over to the rock, getting busy with the decoration of the bamboo. McKay inspected the wands and approved them. Kekko and the three other boys from the Mbelema then stuck them into the sand in a ring, McKay apparently taking infinite pains to place each pole in precisely the right position, sighting from behind it at the rock, with the priestlings watching every move, and Ponda's eyes glued not to lose any of the preliminaries. Once they thought they knew what Sime was doing with the bamboo stem, they gave all their attention to McKay as principal, as he had expected.

The wands fixed, McKay solemnly paced around the rock, taking care to time himself. He had cut his fuse already, and he did not want an anticlimax.

"The stuff's all planted," said Sime in a low voice as McKay passed him. "Fuse almost level with the top of the rock. How about the smoke from it? Won't that give the show away a bit?"

"I'll smother it as much as I can. I'm going to cover the sacred *demit* of the shark god with green boughs," answered McKay. "The sun's high. Time for the big show to start. As we go round, Fred, whistle

something. That's one accomplishment Ponda and his crowd don't savvy. What's more, I've noticed it always makes them uneasy. They think you're talking secret language to our gods. All same Ponda and his Pan's pipes. Make it a march, not too fast. Get the boys together. I'll make Ponda furnish the branches. It 'll mystify them all the more completely to think they have inspected and handled the paraphernalia."

Boughs were brought and piled at McKay's feet. Then the priests took up their stations outside the circle of wands, McKay inviting them to spread out so that they could surround the *demit*-stone of Tuakane. He mounted the rock, knelt, and appeared to whisper into the fissure, putting his head close down as if to receive an answer. Then, while the four boys with their rifles stood like graven images, waiting the command to march, he got Sime to hand him the boughs, and carefully, with many slight changes, spread them over the surface of the stone.

Once more he knelt and spoke into the orifice that was supposed to be the ear of the shark god, and, under cover of the piled-up branches, lit a fusee and ignited the fuse, placing a mat of leaves and twigs above it, leaving air enough to supply the spark, but with the leaves diffusing the slight smoke that would unavoidably come from it.

He took the gaily decorated bamboo and slipped the cork from the neck of the vial. Then he took up his position, two feet outside the margin where the stone joined the sand, Sime outside of him, three paces distant, the native boys, in pairs, outside of Sime, rifles on shoulders, so that the rock was the hub of a wheel of which the peeled wands and the watchful priests, with Ponda, formed the rim, and McKay and his men a spoke that traveled slowly in a moving radius to the tune that Sime whistled. The air was not inappropriate, considering that the spirit of Tuakane was supposed to be somewhere beneath his monument.

John Brown's body lies a moldering in the grave,

whistled Sime, clear and high in the hope

that Lenna Parks, somewhere *perdu*, would hear and hearten:

But his soul goes marching on.

McKay plucked at the end of the puckering string on the seam of his right leg and felt the powder trickling down his leg. He had taken off his shoes, though he had not asked Sime to do so, for the coral grit was painfully hot, even to McKay's well-seasoned soles; and the mixture formed a little train upon the ground, blending so closely that it was hard for even McKay to distinguish it.

Round he went twice, trailing his own tracks until the right-hand pocket was empty. Then he ordered an about-face, twitched the string on his left leg, and retraced the order of march. He carried the bamboo high in his right hand, his arm extended.

Save for the whistling of "John Brown," the place was steeped in silence. The priests were pop-eyed, even to Ponda. Then a murmur ran round the circle of spectators. Sharp eyes had espied a film of smoke rising from the green leaves. The fuse was burning bravely. McKay slid out his watch. He had two minutes more. The smoke was working in his favor.

Ponda and his retinue had not thought of such a thing as a fuse; they knew that the base of the rock was in a spring of water, they themselves had brought the green leaves, Mak-kei had done nothing to them. This must be an answer to the spell he had spoken into the ear of Tuakane. And Tuakane was obeying the *papalangi* magic!

When the mixture in his left pocket was nearly gone, McKay pressed fingers to his left trouser seam and arrested the flow. He was just opposite Ponda. He ordered Sime to take the boys out of the circle and walked toward Ponda, releasing the remainder of the powder. This was an afterthought, born of the manner in which the chlorate and granulated sugar blended with the grit of coral and shell.

In front of Ponda he halted, and very carefully waved the tufted tip of bamboo in a slow circle, arresting the wizard's attention, while the last of his mixture ran

down his leg and made a little cone which he lightly tamped nearly flat with his heel. Once more he took out his watch, openly this time. Thirty seconds!

He deftly adjusted the hands so that they stood at exactly twelve. It was probable that Ponda knew something of the white man's time-keeping methods. Undoubtedly he had seen a watch. Parks would have had one and perhaps had used it for *teriki*.

"You see, Ponda," he said. "The white man's box-that-ticks says it is noon. The shadows are at their shortest. Already the *demit*-stone of Tuakane shows where my fires are working under the sand, working in the water, waiting my word to leap through and burn. Behold!"

He strode back toward the ring of powder, marked by his footprints. If he was a few seconds ahead of the fuse it would not matter much. He did not want to be behindhand. Raising his bamboo staff, he lowered it swiftly to the train, letting the acid run out. He leaped back.

The rock was instantly surrounded by a corona of hissing flame, pale in the sunshine, but unmistakably flame, smelling suggestively of the nether pit; to Ponda's imagination of volcanic fumes. Had this white wizard summoned slumbering fires? A streak of it ran up to his feet and ended in a puff of stinking smoke and sand.

With a muffled roar and a spurt of orange under a pall of smoke and uptossed fragments of green boughs, the *demit*-stone of Tuakane split apart. It was as if a miniature volcano had erupted.

Ponda stood his ground, but it was too much for the priestlings. With yells, they fled under the falling fragments of twigs and leaves, smoldering, stinging scraps that scorched their shoulders as they ran blindly, covering their heads with their arms, stung to mad-speed, fearing they knew not what.

But Ponda's face betrayed his inner perturbation. What might not this white wizard do? He might conjure up subterranean fire and force enough to destroy Motonui, all Aoba perhaps? The memory of the last upheaval of the island was still history rather than legend. And one of his own best bets, the rain-stone, the *demit* of Tuakane, was destroyed.

He covered his alarm with fierce shouts to his fleeing cravens, who halted at a distance with rolling eyeballs fearful of trouble from any and all quarters, from the earth below or the sky above. Gingerly they came forward, surveying the stone, neatly quartered by the dynamite, the sand about it tossed up in all directions. Ponda, under the spur of McKay's smile, approached more closely. McKay pointed out to him the fused remnants of the mixture scattered here and there.

"That is burnt sand, Ponda," he said. "You saw the flames. And I merely whispered in the ear of your own god. What if I had shouted, Ponda?"

The wizard looked at him half resentful, half respectful.

"It was a good *teriki*," he admitted sullenly. "You will show me how to do it?"

"If we come to terms, Ponda. When shall we make a talk?"

McKay recognized that the moment had its touch-and-go. Ponda evidently felt humiliated. The white man's trick had been too successful, too far ahead of anything that Ponda had ever done. When it began to be talked about his prestige might suffer beyond repair.

"Will you show me now in the *marais* (temple) how to make the fire dance upon water? In secret? I will send my priests on ahead."

McKay saw Ponda's aim. To appear at the temple with the white wizard and there retrieve his honors. It would be done at McKay's expense, would serve to show that Ponda also was a supreme master of fire and water. He had his bottle of potassium pellets with him. He decided it might be well to do what Ponda asked. For the burning of the sands was the *teriki* that Ponda would still covet, the spectacular flames in broad daylight, with the culminating explosion that Ponda thought part of the regular performance.

"All right," he said. "Send on your priests."

Ponda made a pompous speech.

"The white man, Mak-kei, had done well," he told them. "But he, Ponda, would show them greater things in the temple. He would outdo this *papalangi* wizard

and confound him. For he, Ponda, would turn water into flame. He would draw fire from the bottom of a bowl and set it hissing and roaring on the surface of the water at his bidding. Perhaps the white man could do this also? They would see."

McKay smiled inwardly at Ponda's cunning. He was to surrender the secret entirely to the wizard and let Ponda confound him with his own magic. The priests left for the temple, hidden somewhere in the bush, to prepare the place with the usual ritual.

"I go to the cave to get my sacred calabashes," said Ponda. "Will you come with me and show me the *teriki*?"

The merest accident prevented McKay from going. He and Ponda were standing apart. Sime was with the native boys. At that moment he called to McKay.

"Kekko here has got something in his eye. Bit of ash, I think. But the damned fool won't let me touch him!" Kekko was standing looking pitifully at his *kapitani* with one eye, while, from the other, red and angry, water ran down his cheek.

"I must look after my man, Ponda," said McKay. "The *teriki* is easy." He took the potassium jar from his pocket. "See, here are bits of the magic dirt that you must hide in your palm or between your fingers and drop into the water. But take care your hands are dry."

Ponda looked at the jar suspiciously and took it reverently. The *teriki* might be easy, but where was he to get the magic dirt when this was gone? And the stuff might back-fire. But he knew the custom of white *kapitanis* to doctor their men and thus retain their fealty. So he went alone.

McKay picked an uncurled frond of banana and opened up the clean coil into a finely pointed but pliant shaving. At his command Kekko knelt and McKay looked for the trouble. One fragment of fine ash had been already washed out; another, probably the charred filament of a leaf-rib, had stuck fairly in the *cornea*.

A deft touch or two and it was out. Kekko's expression as he felt the sharp pain give way to relief, was ecstatic. He bowed his head to the sand, picked up McKay's foot and placed it on his neck.

"That's all right, Kekko," said McKay. "Now you run get my shoes."

The squeal of a pig sounded in the bush. The priestlings had caught their sacrifice for the temple ceremonial. McKay was interested in seeing this *marai*. It was very seldom a white man was permitted within the sacred enclosure. He did not know of any who had visited one.

"Went off in jig-time, didn't it?" said Sime, pulling on his pipe. "I've seen that dope before."

"When?"

"Oh, once," said Sime with a reminiscent grin, "before I started evening up the differences in property and relieving the rich guy of his ill-gotten gains, I was a property-man in a theater. My old man was a stage-carpenter. When *Faust* used to come along the devil got the white-bearded old dodo who wanted to be young again to sign his soul off on a document. Remember? Prop-list called for, one document with red seals; also fire for ink-well and cellar scene. That was where the devil draws wine from a barrel into a cup and it blazes up. You've seen it.

"Well, the dope goes in the inkstand and the cup. The acid is in another ink-well and in the spigot. Sometimes we used to get it made at the drug-store, sometimes I'd mix it. Chlorate of potash and sugar to dilute. If I'd known you had the makings aboard I'd have fixed it for you. It used to make a hit with the theater crowds, and it sure got Ponda's goat. Are you going to give it away like you did the dope in the bottle you slipped him?"

"Not till I have to, Fred. Wonder what's keeping Ponda? I'm getting hungry."

"It's so blamed hot I could carve an overdone slice off my own leg if I was a man-eater," said Sime. "Here he comes. He's put on that bird costume again. I'd say he'd choose something cooler."

The *tataivututu* grotesque was capering toward them.

"Keeping the *tabu* on the village till we're through at the temple," suggested McKay. "Now, what the—?"

The fantastic masquerade danced up to them and halted, the open beak toward McKay. And, peering out of the mask,

there showed the face of a bearded white man—Parks!

"Will you cover me as we go down to the beach?" he asked. "I suppose you've got a boat there. My name's Parks, and—"

"I know," said McKay. "Faroa's on board my schooner. Go get your daughter. I think she's in the *tambu*-house. We'll stroll over toward the bush-trail and wait for you. Better hurry. Those priests are in the temple, but they may come back for something. The village is *tabu*."

"That's why I put on this ostrich business," said Parks. "Thanks. Get your names later."

He capered off, and McKay and his party slowly walked toward the trail that led to the *sing-sing* grounds and thence to the beach.

"Some stunt!" he said to Sime. "Wonder how he got at Ponda. I hope he finished him. Soon as we can we'll get a move on. Hell 'll break loose any minute once they're on to us. That man Parks has got brains."

"I'll say so," said Sime, hitching his guns to the front.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PEARLS.

PARKS played his rôle well. He neither hurried nor wasted time. In front of the *tambu*-house he performed a *devil-devil* dance worthy of Ponda himself. Parks knew, as McKay knew, that there are *Peeping Toms* in every South Sea village. Holes in the thatch are too convenient and too easily made, and curiosity can overcome superstition occasionally; especially with the sex supposed to be most prone to both influences.

So there might be some one looking on, and, if such were the case, it behooved him not to arouse suspicion. *Peeping Toms* in Motonui would look fearfully and none too closely. Any one observing them might report them secretly to Ponda or his assistants, and that meant sure death, for the glorification of the priest.

So Parks, torn with love and anxiety for his daughter, faint from lack of food, and from the struggle in which he had worsted

Ponda—no easy task—and taken from him his *tataivututu* outfit, spared no pains that would bolster up his assumption of Ponda's office. The priests might come back from the temple, but, while he pranced flat-footed, in correct imitation of the original, sweat running from him, half stifled beneath his mask and straw cloak, Parks kept to ritual as he had observed it.

Three times, stiff-legged, he pranced up to the mats that closed the upper half of the front wall of the *tambu*-house and pecked with the beak of his mask upon the poles of the lower half, hopping up the platform steps in absurd imitation of a great bird. The mask could be kept in place by a bar of bamboo held clenched between the teeth, leaving the arms free, but Parks could not show his arms. He had daubed his feet with Ponda's own make-up materials, but he had found no time to blacken his arms, nor could he take from Ponda the latter's ornaments, closely fitted, sunk into the flesh.

He danced up a fourth time and poked the beak through an opening where the mats overlapped badly. A rift of sunlight sifted through the dusk of the *tambu*-house, and a girl, sitting on the mats on the floor, her head to one side, listening, fearing, sprang to her feet. Parks was holding the supporting bar of the mask in one hand and he spoke low but distinctly:

"Come on, Lenna! Step out and follow me as I dance backward. Act as if you were hypnotized. Don't stop for anything. Come!"

As his daughter advanced, Parks retreated, doing a wild whirl in front of the place, and then, springing backward, with an occasional wheel to judge his location, for his only line of vision was straight ahead, through the open beak.

McKay and his party had disappeared into the bush-trail, but had stopped close to its beginning, watching the progress through the dense foliage, McKay and Sime with guns ready, the native boys backing them with their rifles. From the temple the sound of drums had started. The heat was still terrific. For thirty-six hours no winds had moved. It was phenomenal weather.

McKay could see that Parks was rapidly tiring, and he called out low encouragement. The girl glided after her father, facing him, her eyes wide open, without expression, barefooted—McKay winced as he realized how the hot sand must scorch her tender feet—and he set Kekko, an expert in such things, to braid swiftly the primitive, but effective, sandals made from wide and fibrous leaf-lengths.

She wore a covering of snow-white *tapa*-cloth draped like a Grecian garment. Her light-brown hair, shimmering in the sun to gold, streamed down her back below her waist. Her elfin face was peculiarly wistful, and McKay felt the strong appeal of her running through him like heady wine.

Nearer and nearer they came, to all intents and purposes a wizard who held a girl under some uncanny incantation and was leading her off for some fell purpose of his craft. So it would seem to the common people. The priests might think differently.

At the sound of McKay's voice in her own tongue, the set expression of the girl's eyes vanished, and a light sprang into them, such a light as McKay had seen from the banyan bough. With the change, the reason for her almost marvelous preservation from the lust and cruelty of Ponda and the rest—no one of whom had in all probability ever seen a white woman before save for an occasional albino of their own tribe with skin like that of a dried and bleached fish—flashed upon McKay's mind.

Lenna Parks had played mad, and played it successfully. They had believed her possessed of spirits of the dead. Ponda had used this for his own advantage, had meant to establish the girl as his oracle. How much of sanctity he had himself endowed her with was doubtful. Sooner or later he would have broken through it.

At last Parks headed into the trail, almost exhausted, staggering. As she entered the shelter of the bush his daughter sprang toward him with a cry of pity. McKay was stripping the disguise from him, revealing Parks in undershirt and duck trousers that were fouled and torn. He was gaunt to emaciation, unshaven and haggard. But for McKay he would have fallen. But he braced himself and smiled at his daughter.

"All right, Lenna, we're out of it at last. I can go on."

While McKay upheld the captain, Sime brought the green sandals to the girl, who took them with a grateful look and slipped them on, binding them deftly with strips of creeper-stem with which Kekko had ingeniously fitted them.

"Better be pushing along," suggested McKay. "How did you get clear?"

"I heard your voice in Ponda's cave. I was at the back. It gave me courage to slacken the sennit on my arms and legs. When he came in just now in his devil-bird outfit, I tackled him from behind—with these."

He held out hands that, still sinewy, were shaking.

"Kill him?" asked McKay.

"I don't know. His neck was armed with strings of shells. But I choked the black tongue out of his mouth. If they'd fed me— Let's go."

"How about your pearls?" asked McKay suddenly. In the unexpected appearance of Parks and the swift moving of events, he had forgotten them, as Parks himself seemed to have done.

"Hang the pearls!" cried Parks irritably. The man was plainly at the limit of his endurance. "Let's get aboard your ship. Lenna, come! We can come back and get the pearls. They are safely hidden."

McKay did not agree with him. It was extremely probable that, with their prisoners escaped, the tribe would fear reprisal. About the only thing the natives everywhere in the group feared was the British gunboat that made its regular patrols of the coast, with sudden swoops on spots needing a lesson. The tribe would disperse or migrate, and they would be exceedingly likely to take the *demit* with them with all their sacred things.

"Hidden just where, sir?" persisted McKay. "In the body of the *demit*?" The girl flashed him a glance, half surprised, a little indignant.

"Damn you!" exploded Parks weakly. "They are in the skull, if the pearls are all you think about. I am concerned about the safety of my daughter."

"So am I," returned McKay mildly,

recognizing the other's condition, though he was pained to have been misjudged. "That is assured. Sime, you'll bring up the rear with Kekko and Kalui." He lowered his voice. "If Parks is inclined to peg out, let them carry him pickaback. Don't lose any time getting down to the boat. Get them aboard and send the boat back for me. We'll have a fight on our hands, most likely. If there was a hatful of wind we'd get out of here."

"What are you going to do?" demanded Sime.

"I'm going to get their pearls for them. It's probably the only chance."

As he spoke, McKay began to get into the bird-suit. He waved off the demurrer of Sime, saw the little procession started beachward, and moved out of the trail on to what might be called the *plaza* of the village.

It was a risky proposition. He had nothing with which to stain his feet and ankles. One keen glance at his make-up and he was undone. There was little dust to be kicked up from coral grit to hide their lack of blackness, and he simply had to take the chance. The drums still beat, for one thing, but there was every likelihood of some fussy, over-important priest coming back to escort Ponda, and then the fat would be in the fire.

It seemed a mile toward the banyan-tree. He covered it in a slow waltz, with reversals and long-steps, sidling toward his objective. Parks had evidently stuffed his pearls inside the skull by breaking down the papery bone-tissues of the eye-sockets before he plugged them and built up the face with clay.

It was a shrewd trick, and it made McKay's attempt easier. He had had a vision of himself, ridiculous, almost hysterical, waltzing back across the ground with the red, white, and black effigy as a partner, for lack of time in which to break through the tough, willowy boughs that made its framework.

Strong as he was, the motion and the heat and smell of his equipment made him dizzy, and he longed to get through with it by snatching the skull, throwing off the disguise, and making a run for it. That

would break the *tabu*, without doubt, and bring priests and village on his heels.

As he forced himself to the waltz, gyrating ever closer to the banyan, he wondered whether they had guns in the village. Traders—against the law and all good sense—did, he knew, barter rifles, cartridges, and cartridge belts to the more savage tribes. That these had not yet appeared in Motonui was no sign of their permanent absence. Ponda may have hoped to cajole some from him, knowing that poverty in such things might help his plea. Even the most reckless of traders hesitated to oversupply the natives. Such weapons were apt to become boomerangs. Cartridges were always scarce. There was a general legend current to the effect that they were only used on a white man.

Getting ever nearer to his goal, McKay consoled himself with the reflection that the islanders were always wretched shots and knew nothing of raising the sights—could not understand the logic or necessity for such action.

He was under the first vertical boughs of the banyan. Unable to see anywhere but ahead, he turned his back on the village and advanced on the *demit*. Suddenly he realized that the drums had stopped their beating. That might mean anything, nothing, everything! He believed it meant that they had stopped their ritual for the arrival of Ponda. Any second they would go to look for him.

He reached up his arms, brown enough, but not those of a native, and grabbed the skull of Motonui. He was half blinded with the sweat that poured down his face, and his action forced him to place the ridiculous beak to one side, so that he worked by sense of touch alone.

The skull resisted, though he tugged until the whole image swayed elastically on its stilts, and still it resisted him. The grisly thing appeared cemented to the rest. Then reason told him there must be a spike supporting the neck, and he lifted and twisted vigorously.

Off came the skull. Once he shook the thing and felt, rather than heard, through the mask, something rattle dully inside. He had the pearls.

He hid the relic under his grass cloak and began to waltz back again. Something, he had experienced it fifty times when going through the savage bush, warned him of danger. It was as if a cool wind had suddenly traveled up his spine to the roots of his hair and lifted his red thatch.

His right hand gripped a gun. If he could only see better through the damned thing with its sightless eyes goggling above his forehead level! Slowly he turned in his waltz, looking for danger from every quarter.

Still there was nothing visible, and still he knew well that the danger grew. It wasn't nerves. McKay didn't have any. It was fact. He knew how the bush all about one might harbor hundreds, peeping at their quarry, stealing noiselessly through the thick brush, or even creeping overhead.

He was watched. The place was alive with eyes. He had aroused suspicion; they might have seen him at the *demit*, despoiling the image. And they were waiting, waiting, as the tribes always did, for the signal of one in authority. There were eyes glinting through the wall-thatch, out of leafy cover—waiting. Ponda should have given the signal, and Ponda was, McKay prayed devoutly, dead. If they would only give him time enough to get to the trail.

In an instant sound broke out all about him. It was like the lowing and bellowing of strayed cattle lost in the bush, the moaning, rising and falling roar from blown conch shells, the certain signal of invasion, of hostility, of danger. Was it from a neighboring tribe intent upon loot and rapine, or had the villagers crept out from their houses by back ways at some signal unperceived by him?

He was within fifty yards of the beginning of the trail to the *sing-sing* grounds when a shot was fired. It hit the sand a foot ahead of him, spurting it up. He whirled, his pistol ready. From three sides wild figures came leaping toward him. Three or four—this was no time for accuracy of count—had rifles, the rest spears and bows-and-arrows. He recognized the flat-nosed, yellow-haired, baboon-like face of Ponda's chief assistant.

These men were of Motonui. They came

tumbling out of the houses, vaulting over the low barriers at the entrance, yelling and discharging their weapons, a pack in full cry. A rain of bullets and arrows fell about him as he ran zigzag, tearing at his disguise.

The shafts stuck in the sand, some in the voluminous cape of straw, one *whupped* fairly through the conical top of his mask before he got it off, and the cape discarded, the skull tucked under one arm, raced for the entrance to the trail, like a football star racing for his touchdown with the ball.

He plunged in, and a figure slipped out of the side growth and called to him:

"You get your breath, Mac. I'll spot a few of these fellows."

He heard the staccato shots from Sime's guns as he strove to recover his wind. The good scout had come back to cover him. McKay labored to get his breath back to normal, wiping the moisture away that still literally poured into his eyes. They were walled in by the thick jungle, impenetrable at that place even to their enemies. Yells of consternation echoed Sime's target practise. Soon he came back from the entrance.

"Got your wind back, Mac? Then we'd better sprint like the devil, I reckon. They may cut us off."

McKay nodded. He had been thinking the same thing. With the skull tucked under his arm again he followed Sime.

As they went at top speed across the *sing-sing* place, some one fired a rifle at them and missed. The resonant conch-shells were still blowing. They dived into the path to the beach, taking long strides as it began to descend gently to water-level, their legs taking them on willy-nilly, though their lungs were burning up, their hearts pounding against their ribs.

The beach-gap opened. They could see the green of the lagoon, the white breakers, the blue sea beyond. Not as yet the schooner. They were clear. If only Tomi had got the boat back? He had had ample time.

There came a crackle of rifle-fire ahead of them. A canoe glided along the lagoon, followed by another, high-prowed—high-pooped.

"Firing from the schooner," said McKay pantingly.

The tall figure of a savage blocked the trail exit. His face peered at them. McKay fired, hitting over the left breast nipple, and the man dropped like a log.

"Cut off, Fred," said McKay, "back and front. Got to run the gantlet to that ledge of rocks. Have you reloaded?"

"Yep. Wish I had got my second wind. Ready?"

They leaped out. There were five canoes in the lagoon. Twoscore of figures were tearing over the beach, and a ferocious shout of triumph reached them as they gained the free sand. But the man they had shot was ahead of the rest. The way to the ledge was clear, if their lungs would hold out. One canoe had gone through the reef-gap, and they were firing on it from the schooner. There was no sign of Tomi or the boat. A canoe started to paddle furiously toward the beach. It was touch-and-go, with little energy left for the going.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE PROMONTORY.

TWICE McKay and Sime turned on their pursuers, partly from sheer inability to go on, partly to check the savages. The latter had no relish for the shooting of Sime, whose pistol-range equaled that of their arrows. Their rifle-fire was so badly aimed as to be almost negligible.

"Don't chuck away any cartridge," gasped McKay. "Can't—get—rifles until after dark."

Sime nodded. He had no breath for words. It was marvelous how he controlled his firing, so shaken was he by the sobs of his laboring lungs. In their last spurt they staggered forward like drunken men, barely able to clamber up the rocks by a deep gully that traversed the side of the ridge and drop into a little natural fortress, through the rocks of which they peered down at the natives, who seemed to have lost all stomach for the fight that now necessitated their climbing to the attack.

They shot arrows upward, in the hope that they might drop inside the space where the two white men were garrisoned. They jabbered and shook their spears, and finally

retreated to watch the progress of the canoe-battle.

McKay and Sime, seeing the pursuit temporarily stalled, sought the tiny runlet of water that McKay had marked, flung themselves down on their bellies, and lapped at it like two tired dogs. Then Sime, without rising, rolled over into a strip of shade and lay face downward, exhausted. McKay marked his thin shoulders heaving under the clothing that, like his own, was saturated as much as if they had been swimming rather than running.

McKay, weary and feeling drawn, got up and surveyed his schooner. Only the one canoe had ventured near the ship, and a smart rifle-fire had driven it off to cautious distance. But the other canoes hung about the reef-gap, cutting off communication with the Mbelema.

He walked across the promontory and surveyed the farther side. Here an arm of the sea ran in clear to low ledges of rocks where the bush started within reach of the spray, without beach, even at low tide, he estimated.

The sun had three hours of journey before darkness. Its beams still turned the rocks to an oven. The water that had percolated through the porous strata, siphoning up from an inland source, had been warm and none too fresh. They had no food.

Back of the promontory was the black line of bush, with no edible fruits in sight. Some shellfish might be had later, but that was salty food, and, in those seas, always risky, pregnant with *ptomaine* possibilities. At its best, in the prevailing heat, they would form a scanty meal that would only aggravate a thirst. The schooner was cut off, calm-bound, able only at best to protect itself.

He went back to Sime, who had turned on his back and lay very still, one arm across his eyes. He sat up weakly when McKay reached him, and McKay was shocked to see how sick the Californian looked. But he smiled wanly and gamely.

"Still in the running, Mac, though I'm glad of a rest. We got down to the boat, all right, and then I turned back. I figured I might be needed. Those canoes must

have shown up soon after I left. They must have made short cuts through the bush-trails. It was a mercy I didn't run into a bunch of them. You had a close shave. But you've got the pearls?"

McKay held up the skull and shook it.

"Somewhere about a fifth of a million dollars here," he said, "if reports are true."

"If it was mine," said Sime with a wry grin, "I'd swap it right now for some—let me see—cold potato salad, cold roast beef, and a big stein of beer, with the last repeated. How about you?"

"Glad to see you've still got your appetite with you," said McKay. "Anyway, we can smoke. How was Parks?"

"Tuckered out," said Sime, puffing at his pipe. "He was shivering with some sort of ague, and he told me he'd got dysentery. His girl is going to put him in a bunk right off and dose him with quinin and cholera mixture, if you've got any aboard."

"Both," said McKay laconically.

"What's the next move?"

"Hold 'em off till dark. Then we've got to sneak down and get those rifles. We'll give 'em a surprise-party if they try to rush—in the morning. After that—"

"What's worrying you?"

"The dynamite. I put it in my little safe in the cabin. Always do whenever I go ashore, for fear the boys will monkey with it, stunning fish. Parks, if he isn't too sick to think of it, won't be able to get at it. If he could, he'd throw a scare into those natives that would send them scattering, and give us a chance to get in touch with the ship. Even then we'd be stuck till the wind comes, and there isn't a sign of it. But we could eat. So long as they stick around that gap in the reef they've got us cut off. We might swim the lagoon and sneak over the reef at low tide. They'll patrol it to a certain extent with torches, but they are not much on night-fighting. We might make it."

"Not me, Mac," said Sime. "I'll hold the fort. I'm scared stiff of sharks. I wouldn't try that swim if I saw them making an oven for me. You tackle it."

McKay looked at Sime's strained face, his sunken eyes, and pinched features. The

Californian was nearly all in, and the sun was steadily sapping his remaining strength.

"We'll stay where we are together," said McKay. "Something may break to-morrow. I'm afraid Parks was too weak to settle Ponda's hash altogether. This thing is too concerted to be without a leader. He may have put Ponda in sick bay for a while, but that devil's brain is still working!"

Sime said nothing, and they smoked on, hugging the shadows that gradually lengthened westward. Despite the sinking sun, it did not grow perceptibly cooler.

"This is regular earthquake weather," said McKay presently.

"Any chance of the island having the bellyache?" asked Sime. "We might get clear in the excitement, some way."

McKay shook his head. "Not much chance of that," he said. "The islands get shaken up once in a while, but as long as Mount Marion and the crater on Tanna keep open as safety-valves, nothing very serious is likely to happen. All the islands of the group get stirred up once in a while, to judge by the beach-marks. That sand up in the village was once at sea-level, but that was hundreds of years ago."

"They're leaving us alone," remarked Sime after a while, peering over a rim of rock."

"Had their lesson. They may try to rush us before dark. How are you fixed for cartridges?"

Sime counted.

"Nineteen, with what are in the guns," he said.

"I've got eleven," said McKay. "We'll not waste them."

"Let's have a look at the pearls."

"What's the use, Fred. I'd rather hand them over to Parks in the original package." He spoke with a touch of resentment, and Sime looked at him curiously. McKay had not forgotten Parks's emphasis nor the girl's look.

"What's the use?" echoed Sime. "Those dirty skunks are eating."

A fire showed on the sand. One of the canoes had caught some fish and they were being baked in seaweed. Some natives brought down bananas and coconuts, and the islanders gathered to their feast.

"Water's filling," said McKay resignedly. "If you get enough of it, I don't believe they'll worry us to-night. They figure they've got us cornered. To-morrow they'll rush the schooner. I'll bet they are waiting for Ponda to get the crick out of his neck to-night."

The sun sank, the violet, transparent dusk deepened to a purple void in which the stars swam golden. Drums started to drone about the fires, and a deep chant arose. Two canoes, furnished with torches that were constantly renewed in the bows as they burned down, patrolled the reef near the entrance. The tide fell, and the breakers hissed and surged across the reef in streaks of phosphorescent foam and water.

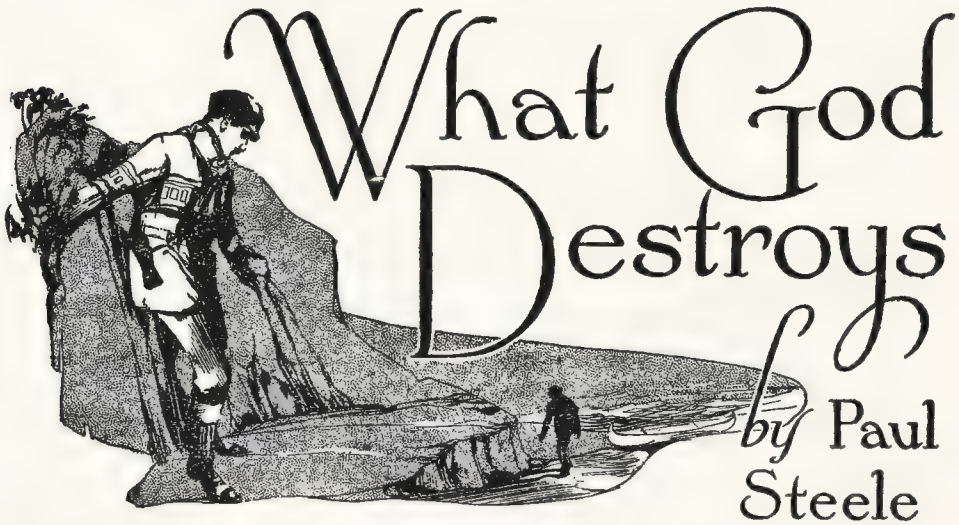
Sime started to snore, but McKay kept vigil. With Parks sick and the schooner lacking a leader, they were all in a tight box. If only he had not shut up the dynamite in the safe, Tomi might think of it,

but he was powerless to get it. To-morrow the savages would attack the schooner from all sides, and the odds were they would capture it. The odds were too great.

He hoped and prayed, and, sailor-fashion, whistled softly for a wind that the schooner could take advantage of, though he somehow felt certain that the girl who would, with her father sick, be the dominant character aboard, would not sail away on the slim chance of bringing rescue before he and Sime were rushed, or perished of heat and starvation. Sime could not stand many hours of such exposure, he was sure. But he could not bring himself to leave him. Still, it might be their only chance. In the dark—

His sense of danger thrilled through him, and he was up and alert. He felt, rather than possibly could he hear, the soft scuff of footsteps on the sand at the foot of the rocks. The drums and chant had been started to cover an attack.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



"G -GUESS I'll turn in, Hank."

The smaller gray man's eyes flashed sidewise craftily at the big figure swaying in the upholstered seat of the Pullman smoker as the heavy train swayed round a curve.

"'N a minute," he rejoined. "Have another, Herb." He passed a black bottle into the flaccid fingers, which tightened in-

stinctively about the glass. Straightening, he took another long pull, grunted, coughed, and handed back the bottle.

He sat with hazel eyes staring dully across the compartment. Those of the smaller man, that chanced to be of similar hue, watched him steadily. The heavy chestnut hair of the big fellow hung, disordered, nearly in his eyes. He was in

shirt-sleeves, his check coat tossed beside him. Sweltering in the thick steam heat, he started to uproll his right sleeve. Tattooed upon the muscular forearm showed the initials "H. M."

Henry Meigs, with a startled glance toward the curtained entrance to make sure that nobody was passing, reached forward and swiftly pulled down the sleeve.

"Don't be a damned fool, Herb!" he growled low. "You ain't drunk enough for that yet!"

Herb's heels kicked back against the side of a battered russet bag, thrust under the seat, under his legs. He performed the action mechanically, as if to reassure himself of its presence.

"Sick of—rotten business!" he growled with tipsy disgust. "Been goin' straight for seven years—an' now Con Bagley's got me, like he always did. How can I help it? He got it on me—in Manitoba!"

"Shut up!" hissed Hank Meigs in alarm. "You cheap quitter!" But the thickened voice droned on, great, drowsing chest tones that were drowned, however, by the merged roar of the train and the storm.

"Wish I'd—told him to go—to hell! I could have lit out; let him do his own dirty business, the big, bum coward! But the old stuff got me; I'd been good too long," he sneered.

He turned a wavering glance toward the fidgeting gray man as he tore away the shirt from his sweating, hairy chest.

"Hot's a furnace in here!" he rumbled, reaching out an unsteady hand. "Gimme that bottle, Hank!"

Meigs hesitated. "You've had enough, Herb. Better turn in now."

"Gimme that bottle!" The voice had deepened, with an ugly note. "Want me to bust it over your head?"

Hank passed it over. "Drink hearty!" In an undertone he added: "It might get you ready to sleep. But how much does it take?"

The tall, red-faced fellow, a splendid physical specimen, took a long, deep swallow. "Have another!" urged his companion. Herb leered at him cunningly, his eyes watering and blinking from the effects of the fiery draft.

"Get me drunk, eh?" he asked in a sharper tone that dwindled to drowsiness as he proceeded. "I sh'd say not! Every one's after me! Bagley—then you— Say, what's there to it, huh?"

He laughed discordantly above the below of the storm. "You—the joker! Bagley 'll be tickled to death, won't he, when he finds out the good job you done for yourself, spyin' on me? An' he don't know there's such a man as you! When he knows it's got to be split *three* ways—wow!"

The gray man had leaped up, his seedy figure in sharp contrast to Herb's well-made if rather flamboyant garments. His nervous hand clapped over the larger man's mouth.

"For God's sake, keep still!" he urged in a sharp undertone. "Some one coming—"

As the negro porter came in to distribute some fresh towels in the rack, he was again handing Herb the bottle. He was satisfied that the black man had heard nothing of his companion's mumbling reminiscences. Stolidly staring at the porter, the drunken man retained sufficient precautionary sense to remain quiet till he had left.

Then he began muttering again, now in broken snatches, with hiccuping intervals between. His words grew fewer; he mulled with knitted brows a recurrent problem, and kicked backward to assure himself that the battered satchel remained under the seat. Then he would talk again, wildly; cursing sin and virtue impartially; sneering at the man who awaited him up the line, and at the seedy Meigs, who was unexpectedly accompanying him; maudlinly tearful over days when he had been honest, futilely angry over this lapse into crime after seven years.

Meigs, fearing his mighty muscles, had to bear with him, straining his keen ears for the possible approach of other footsteps; thankful that the passengers in the car were few and apparently asleep; hoping that the porter would not return till after Herb had quieted sufficiently to allow him to lead him to his berth.

Meanwhile the train drove on through the black night, straight north from Toronto, in the teeth of the ravening storm.

Past the frosted windows of the sleepers scurried jets of snow, but the simmering steam-pipes bade defiance to the outer blasts of bitter cold. Above the wind that howled like a monster pack of wolves came the gruntings and coughings of the two locomotives, panting over a drifting right-of-way, disputing with unleashed elements flung in force against the headlights.

Hissing, yelling, growling with maniacal frenzy beat the storm, a menace hurled from frozen Arctic waters beyond the shaggy wilderness of mines, of lumber camps, of straggling farms, of camps that had in a twinkling become twentieth-century towns in the restless march of the pioneers. A mad witch, flailing at progress, raved the storm, and the long train, scheduled for the transcontinental line far to the north, lurched and trembled in its grip while doggedly pushing on.

"Say, Herb, come on now. You got a lower berth; you ain't got to climb for it. An' you can snooze yer head off; we won't be there before afternoon in this blizzard. Come on, Herb; I'll pull off yer clothes."

The gray man was shaking the dozing big fellow by the shoulder, keeping wary guard for a possible outflinging of a big hand. "Lemme 'lone!"

"Come on, Herb! There's just one swaller left in the bottle; take it for a nightcap an' come on!"

"A' right," agreed the other, and reached. He took the final draft and tossed the bottle upon the floor, where it rolled with the swaying of the car. He started to rise, struggled with an arresting hazy thought, and reached down under the seat for the satchel. He grinned cunningly and upreared on unsteady feet.

The train rounded a curve just then, and he staggered head first toward a window. Meigs clutched him and held him up, panting with the effort. He was spare and fragile.

"Curse it! What's the — matter?" growled Herb Mason. His hand tightened upon the handle of his bag.

"It's all right, Herb," gasped Hank. "Steady, now! Here, get yer wing over my shoulder. I'll help ye to the berth."

Just as they gained the passageway out-

side the curtains Meigs fronted the ivory grin of the porter. "Want any help, suh?" asked the African.

"No; I can manage him."

Soon there came heavy snoring while Meigs pulled off Herb's garments as best he could. He noted the lettering upon the curtain. "No. 13!" he muttered.

It was an hour later. Throughout the long line of dimly lighted cars was slumber, deep or uneasy, as it chanced. In the sleeper Golconda, where Herb Mason lay inert and snoring, few berths were occupied. The porter was curled up on the long seat in the smoking compartment, wrapped in a gray blanket. In the general somnolence, only the red eyes and stubborn clanking of the train, the blind fury of the storm, seemed alive.

The train was now increasing its momentum, rolling down the long, easy grade leading to the first scheduled stop at Mohican.

When with appalling suddenness came a reeling, a staggering, sidewise plunge; the falling of tons of wood and steel, imprisoning human mites like rats, to agony and death and chaos.

Above the horror laughed the storm, a mad thing, a menace that now laughed in joy at murder.

Sparse messages were flashed from Mohican, spreading consternation. The raving blizzard hindered first the rescue and wrecking operations, following the frightful accident due to a spread rail at a drifted turn. Next it delayed the reception, at points up the line that lay deep in snow, of Toronto newspapers on the following day, wired by reporters sent upon a special "club" train to Mohican, a hundred-odd miles north.

At Furney, over two hundred miles above Mohican, and in the heart of the mining region, a cloud of furred, capped, mackinawed figures waited at the station, watching the first train to come through from Toronto since the storm, slowly approaching. It was the afternoon of the second day following the wreck.

Grunting, the engine came to a grinding halt. To the stack it was covered with snow.

The rotary plow which had cleared a path for it had passed on a half-hour previously, headed for Clemmins and the Transcontinental beyond.

From the combination mail-and-express car were flung fat bundles of newspapers into the hands of the two news-dealers of the place. The crowd jammed around them. "Never mind taking 'em to the stores!" called a voice. "Sell 'em here!"

The dealers ripped the wrappers open. The editions flashed into eager hands, there was much jingling of change.

"How many you got, besides the *Call*? *Challenge* and *Tocsin*, eh? Gimme all three of 'em!"

There was a sharp note of impatience in the voice that held deep, growling undertones. The face was bearded to the light blue, evil eyes. Red locks, the hue of the whiskers, straggled from under a coonskin cap. The figure was squat and unwieldy; the gait rolling, like that of a grizzly.

Grabbing the extended sheets, the fellow, clad like most of the others in mackinaw and felt boots, tossed the dealer some change. He stuffed the newspapers in a pocket and passed through a near-by street to a road which led west, and that had been kept well broken by passing log sleds traveling to and from camps in the vicinity.

Con Bagley, who had held Herb Mason in his power through knowledge of a theft he had committed years before, and who had been awaiting his arrival in Furney with the loot he had influenced him to secure again after years of "going straight," tramped swiftly along. Past patches of forest, white-crowned, and ledges of sullen gray showing through fissures in the snowy carpet, he went down a long hill and up the other side.

Two miles from the town he came to the lonely cabin he had rented nearly two months before, the rendezvous to which he had gone to await Mason, after seeing him in distant Alberta and inducing him to commit this latest robbery by a mixture of cajolery and threats, as well as arousing the spirit of cupidity that had for years lain dormant in the breast of the man who thought to have "got off the old stuff."

"Why should you work the rest of yer

life for nothin'?" had argued Bagley, after appearing to Mason like a dark ghost of the past. "There's a big haul here, an' it might's well be ours, fifty-fifty. Now here's the layout; we can make it look like you crossed the border, after you crack the crib, an' the Yankee police 'll have their eyes out for you, lookin' to nab you an' hold you for extradition. No one 'll think of your stayin' in Canada, especial' if you shave off them whiskers. While they're chasin' you south, followin' our phony track, you can slide east to Toronto, an' then come north to Furney. Then we'll put north for some o' the outposts near James Bay, an' quarter for the winter.

"Either that or—well, you, recollect Manitoba. I've got it on you—an' you ain't got a thing on me! Now, will you come in, an' be fixed for the rest of yer life, in the States, when the war-cry's over, or will you pass it up—an' land in jail on that old Manitoba thing?"

"You're leavin' all the risk for me!" Mason had growled. "You ain't takin' none of it, I notice!"

"I don't have to!" Bagley answered, with a wicked leer. "I wa'n't in on the Manitoba thing!"

Finally Mason agreed. Bagley had received a telegram, by prearrangement, from "Clem Huggins," the name that Mason had undertaken to assume after the robbery, that "he was on his way to visit him."

What Bagley did not know was that Mason was bringing along Henry Meigs because he had to. Meigs, a crafty fellow-employee of Mason's, had caught him red-handed in the night, perpetrating the robbery—and the promise of a third of the loot when the pair should meet Bagley was the price of his silence.

Then had flashed over the wire the news of the wreck of the express in the storm. The meager despatch had filled Bagley, waiting at Furney, with consternation. From the wreck, and the fire which had nearly consumed it, few had escaped alive. He had waited in suspense, hoping that Mason would come through with the goods; that he somehow escaped.

He turned from the road into his cabin. He would have read the newspapers on the

way, but his eyes were weak from several months of dissipation, and the glare of the sun upon the snow had nearly blinded him.

Blinking, as he gained the gloomy interior, he spread out the papers upon the table with trembling hands and started greedily to read the news of the accident, under black head-lines.

Myriad gruesome incidents were given. It was not till he was conning the final newspaper that some paragraphs under a sub-head rewarded his anxious search.

ROBBER AND BOOTY BURNED.

Tragic Fate Claims Man Alleged to Have Stolen from Concern in Alberta.

Among the corpses found in the wreckage of one of the burned cars in the Mohican tragedy was one that apparently tells the last chapter in a robbery recently reported from Laidlaw, in the province of Alberta.

It will be recalled that the Alberta Forest and Development Company, the largest of its kind in the Dominion, conducted a banking annex in its office for the benefit of its great force of employees. One night the safe was opened, and notes and negotiable papers to the amount of seventy-five thousand dollars were taken.

Simultaneously disappeared the superintendent, Herbert Mason, a trusted employee who possessed the combination of the safe. Mason was supposed to be headed for the American border, and the authorities on both sides were on the alert for him.

It appears, however, that instead of this he was headed east, in the Dominion, and was then swinging north to lose himself in the wilds of the mining country. In this clever ruse, however, fate intervened.

In the wreck of the forward sleeper, where ruin was the most complete, was found a man's body, charred to a crisp. By it was found the remnants of a leather bag and the burned fragments of notes and some scraps of paper. One only could be identified sufficiently to reveal the name of the Alberta Forest and Development Company. By the unrecognizable head of the body lay a woolen hat that had not been consumed. The band bore the name of "Herbert Mason." The loot was burned beyond redemption.

It is evident that fate prevented one of the slickest "getaways" in the criminal annals of the Dominion. Where Mason was headed for is problematical.

Con Bagley, who had read while sitting rigid, with staring eyes, finished the ac-

count. Then he reread the last line. His tension visibly relaxed.

"Where Mason was headed for is problematical."

Then he began to curse, with mingled feelings.

There was that of rage for his cunning plan thwarted by fate; with thought of the stolen money, destroyed beyond redemption, that his fingers would never clutch. He had meant to take it *all*; to decamp with the portion of his double-crossed partner in crime as well as his own. He did not know that a third scoundrel, Henry Meigs, was to be reckoned with.

And he cursed with relief, too. No scrap of paper, no shred of evidence had been found bearing the name of Con Bagley. He had always played safe; it worked yet.

Gloomily he looked out of the window. The sun had passed under a bank of clouds; the gray austerity of the northern open was depressing to his spirit. His dream of ill-gotten wealth was done. He was too much the coward to plan another such exploit for his *own* hands to do. And he had little money left.

"I've got to get a lumberin' job," he muttered dismally. "An' in the spring I'm goin' to start gold prospectin' again. I ain't never had much luck at it, but I've got to try it again. It's all there is left."

He cursed again, staring out into the gray haze of December, now spreading from banks of leaden clouds that canopied the sky.

The new year found the shaggy, surly fellow doing odd jobs about Furney to make his livelihood. Nobody knew him there. But this did not especially matter. Nobody "had anything" on him. He had always "played it safe."

With the spring break-up he purchased a prospector's outfit and struck forth alone into the rugged ranges to the north. The arrival of winter found him back in Furney, doing odd jobs. Again he tenanted the lonely cabin. He muttered much to himself, of unearned riches that had been destroyed by fire. He cursed a man for having died. He cursed the rock-bound riches that had eluded him through the summer, while

pursuing his fitful search amid lonely forests and waters, camping by promising ranges that presented, to all his searchings, a gray sneer.

With the arrival of the second spring he was away again, alone as before. The "big strike" had become an obsession with him. The world owed him his haul; he would have it, one way or another.

June was well advanced when, one glorious evening, as the veil of the dusk was settling down over a scene of grandeur, and the shadows of mighty trees mirrored a still lake, Con Bagley was preparing his supper by the camp-fire upon the shore. Suddenly he looked up and listened.

For days he had not seen a human being, not even an Indian. Yet it was unmistakable, the deepening dip of a paddle around a bend. A canoe swept into view. The occupant saw him and swung his prow his way.

Soon, slowly, laboriously, a figure got out of the grounded canoe, and advanced toward him in the twilight, which was not deep enough yet to obscure an apparition that was startling.

Con Bagley stared at the hunched, meager figure of the gray man. His hair pulled at the scalp and his flesh bristled. The face that stared at him was terrible.

It was scarred almost beyond human semblance. One side of the face showed a depression, as if it had been caved in. A hazel eye blinked at Bagley; there was an odd, fixed something in the stare of the other. In an instant he realized that it was made of glass.

The twisted mouth lifted at one side, in a smile like the grimace of a dog. The dazzling flash between the withered lips told of artificial teeth. The chin was held low, as if there were a permanent stiffening of the neck. And Bagley had noticed, as he approached him, that he walked with jerky steps, as if the muscular freedom of his legs were permanently impaired.

"You're Con Bagley, ain't you?" The voice was high and rasping, telling of wheezy lung power. The gray man was breathing heavily with his exertions in the canoe.

"Yes," rumbled Bagley sullenly, relieved

at hearing the voice of the uncanny visitor. Like most woodsmen, he was superstitious. "Who the hell are you?"

Came a rasping chuckle; somehow it tinged Bagley's blood anew with chill foreboding.

"I ain't any one you ever expected. I'm Henry Meigs."

"Henry Meigs?" repeated Bagley, cringing. Perhaps—perhaps there had been somebody who had something on him.

"Yes. An' I've been trailin' you for months. I heard you was on a prospectin' trip. I've come to be your partner."

"What are you talkin' about?" demanded Bagley. "I don't want no partner! What—who—"

"Don't want no partner, eh?" replied the gray man, with a grisly laugh. "I guess not! Whether you was plannin' to make a steal, an' let George do it, or prospectin' for honest gold. No, I guess you don't want no partner; but you're goin' to have!"

"You—you—" spluttered Bagley. He could have killed the fragile hulk before him with a blow, and no one would have been the wiser in these solitudes. But somehow he did not launch it.

The single, good eye twinkled cunningly; the glass optic glittered strangely in the gathering dusk.

"Henry Meigs," announced the stranger, "is the man who caught your partner, Herb Mason, robbin' the safe of that Alberta Development Company. Henry Meigs is the man who you didn't know about, that insisted on Mason bringin' him along up to Furney to meet you. Henry Meigs was the *third* man in that deal. You didn't know it, Bagley, but that haul was goin' to be split *three* ways."

Bagley, staring, reeled back. He shuddered; his evil mouth gaped in amaze.

"Gets ye, eh?" chuckled the gray man.

"You see, Mason was drunk most of the way east; drunk an' conscience-struck. Wa'n't he a damn fool to have a conscience? An' I guess he must have blabbed everything he ever heard. Yah, Bagley, the things I know about you! An' most of all, about the Alberta robbery!"

He stumped toward the fire. The deepening of evening brought the northern chill.

He stood trembling by the blaze, extending his skinny hands, rubbing them together.

"I've had a hard chase," he rambled. Damn you, Bagley, you're as hard to find as Mason told me you was. I worked with Mason. Fine chap, if you'd let him alone. Of course, that wouldn't ha' got us anything—but it didn't, anyway."

He laughed crazily. "God! I was months in a Toronto hospital, looked like sure death, but you never could kill me. Like a kid, like a man, that's the way I am. I've got ninety-nine lives; talk about a bum cat!

"Seemed like a hundred years in the hospital, while they was makin' me over. An' the pain—say, man! Greatest surgeon in Canada, they said; he was workin' on me for his own reputation—an' when he sent me out, the way I am, they gave him a vote o' thanks or something.

"Get busy, partner, an' gimme something to eat, an' some coffee. I'm starved like a wolf!"

Mechanically Bagley started to do as he was bidden. It was as if he were under a weird influence and dared not disobey.

"Let's see," pursued the gray man a little later, as he squatted before the campfire, eating greedily. Bagley was not eating. "There was a lot o' money stuffed in that satchel: papers, notes an' all. About seventy-five thousand dollars. Lot o' kale there, eh, partner? An' we didn't get a smell of it."

Bagley writhed where he sat huddled against a tree. He did not speak. His look toward the hunched figure was unspeakably evil.

"So," went on the gray man, "I made my plan while I was in the hospital. When the rest of 'em said I'd die, the surgeon an' I said I wouldn't. An' as soon as I got out I started lookin' for you. It's been hard going; I was nearly all in when I found you."

He chewed at a bread crust. There was audible the rattle of his artificial teeth.

"You know what a peach prospector Mason was, Bagley? But he gave it up after he'd found two fortunes an' wasted 'em. An' died at only thirty-five, at that. But he had a nose for the ledges."

"Yes," grunted Bagley, his shifty eyes flashing to the grim figure crouched in the firelight, "he was a wonder at it."

"Well," crowed the gray man, "cheer up about havin' a partner. He was good, but I'm better. I proved it in Alaska—an' I wasted the stuff same as Mason did. Didn't you ever hear of Hank Meigs up in Alaska?"

"Yeah," replied Bagley, his eyes brightening at an obscure memory now revived, "I did. You're an older man than us."

Mockingly the gray man swept off his cap. His crown was bald and shining.

"Fever first," he explained laconically. "I was afire from head to foot in the hospital. Then the pain—it made what was left of it white, like you see. But there's a lot o' stuff left in the old bald nut. You'll see!

"I ain't very strong. You'll have to sort o' cart me around, partner. There's two of us now; the third one's dead. We're after as big a haul as the one we lost. We've got seventy-five thousand dollars to get. If we can't get it out of a steel safe, we'll find it in a rock. You'll have to do most of the work, and I'll find the strike; if it takes a year or if it takes five!

"Then we share an' share alike?"

Con Bagley grunted eagerly. The gray man lighted a pipe and smoked silently over the fire, which Bagley rose to replenish.

The plumed night shut down. The scarred, frightful face of the gray man showed fitfully in the leaping flame of the fire. Against the tree rested Bagley, his glowering eyes searching the bowed, maimed figure. They shot sparks of evil while Con dreamed his dreams.

"Share and share alike, eh? Well, they'd have to make the strike first."

It was the second summer of this odd partnership that the strike was made, in a region a hundred miles west of the point where the two had met on the shore of the lake. As he had constantly assured Bagley, he would do, when gibing at his blundering, even while Con carried him—almost—in the faring through the wilds, like a carping "old man of the sea," it was the gray man who made it.

In a dramatic moment he uttered to the exultant Bagley an unexpected warning:

"Look here, Bagley, I know what you're thinkin'. Get off that stuff, an' get off it quick!"

"What—what—" stammered Bagley, but again in his eyes came the look of fear.

"You're figurin' on leavin' me dead up here, with some cock-an'-bull story of an accident," chuckled the gray man. "An' get down an' record this claim yourself, an' sell it for a fancy price an' get the whole caboodle of coin. It 'll be snapped up quick—there ain't been such a haul in years."

"But you won't do it. You'll forget it quick."

Bagley took a threatening step forward. "What's to prevent me?" he demanded in an ugly tone.

"If I ain't back in Furney, safe and sound, by snowfall, you're as good as dead!" drawled the other. "I've got things fixed."

The lurking fear returned to Bagley's eyes. His ensuing solitude, that his partner should return safe and sound, southward, was ludicrous—and grim.

They returned as swiftly as possible to frontier civilization. The claim was recorded. They spent the winter in interesting capital from Toronto and New York. With the next spring break-up they piloted some financiers and experts up into that district, that white men's feet had not trod till their own had explored it.

After that negotiations hung fire only for a few days over the point of what the company would pay for the claim. They wanted to pay sixty thousand dollars. The gray partner, upon whom Con Bagley had to depend, as the bald head held a far sharper and better versed brain than that which lay under his own red poll, insisted upon seventy-five thousand dollars. He won his point.

Bagley, who had been at his partner's elbow during the negotiations, until he had grown uneasy through recognizing in one of the experts a man he feared might remember him in an episode of ten years before, and "have something on him," sat up-stairs in his room in a Toronto hotel

and watched for his partner to emerge from an opposite bank. He had already signed such papers as had been presented to him.

Hungrily, suspiciously he watched. His lifelong dream was all but realized. That the money came honestly did not matter.

However, his gaze was suspicious. His room was only one floor up. Meigs would have to emerge from the bank upon the street. Maimed, and of halting gait as he was, he was of unescapable personality. If he tried to make a getaway, Bagley, hurrying to the street, would have him caught before he had gone a block.

He breathed a sigh of relief. Meigs was coming out of the bank door, a spruce but horrible figure. He was leering at the group of capitalists, shaking their hands in parting.

He crossed the street slowly, painfully to the hotel. At the window above crouched Bagley, grinning, rubbing his hands. If not the whole of it, at least the half, thirty-seven thousand five hundred dollars, was his!

"Certified checks, huh? Well, where's mine?"

"You ain't got any, Bagley. Here's just one certified check for seventy-five thousand dollars, payable to the order of—"

He paused. His trembling, hazel eye, and the staring orb of glass rested on Con Bagley's whitening, brutish face. Slowly, in his high, rasping voice, he finished his sentence.

"Payable to the order of The Alberta Forest and Development Company, of Laidlaw, Alberta!"

While Bagley stood transfixed, glaring, he pursued his amazing explanation.

"I buffaloed you all through, Bagley. The claim was filed jointly; you was right there; I had to give you that much. But I figured on you bein' a damn fool afterward, which you was. In those papers you signed was one givin' over your half to me, 'for a dollar an' valuable considerations.' You're out. Here's the dollar, apply it on yer room rent." He flung a bill upon the table.

"About the Alberta company," he added, "I'm representin' 'em."

Bagley threw clenched hands aloft, beating the air. "I'll kill—" he growled like a beast. "I'll—kill—"

"No you won't! You 'd killed me up north if you dared! I bluffed you with a lie about havin' things fixed at Furney if I didn't come back. I'm bluffin' you now. You don't dare to kill me, here in the crowded town, where every one would know. You could do it with a wallop—but you dassent!"

His voice had strengthened, rising to a soft, semiscream, seamed, maimed, hideous, he limped toward the squat giant who stood and shook with impotent anger and with disgusting fear.

"You always played safe," pursued the gray man. "Play safe now, an' die in the poorhouse, while I die in prison!"

"In—prison!"

"Yes. My bag's packed; the certified check's back in my wallet; I'm gettin' the Western flyer for Laidlaw, Alberta. I'll deliver that check to the development company, an' then ask 'em to let me die in prison—for what I did!"

Bagley muttered, disbelieving his ears. "For what—you—done? What—"

The one sound hazel eye blazed, the other stared sinisterly as the gray man came a step closer.

"For what I did! It was when they asked me my name at the hospital it came to me, first for self-preservation. The initials were the same; it would help if anything about Mason's identifyin' marks got into the Ontario papers. So I told 'em it was Henry Meigs. Nobody knew Henry Meigs was in it, the third man.

"Then it came to me what to do, through prospectin' to make good for what I did in Alberta. I couldn't wipe out all the rough stuff in my life, but I could pay up for that. To look you up an' make you do the work, an' use the one good eye the Lord left me to locate the leads, like I used to; that was the ticket. An' it's *done*!

"Just to pay up, an' then die in prison where I belong—that's all I want. It won't be long—the pains are shootin' down deeper; they'll reach my heart—an' I'll be glad!

"In the wreck, that's where I got mine.

An' in the months o' pain afterward I learned through what seemed *years*—the answer."

His rasping voice broke a little. The single good eye was suddenly wet. His withered hands clenched, trembling. He shook convulsively, this man of less than forty, who looked seventy.

"I learned in that smash what God kills in a man to make him fit to die. It's—sin!"

Through it all Bagley had stood as if rooted, incredulous, rigid with amazement and awe, with an uncharted chaos of feelings.

"Who—who *are* you?" he gasped.

Again the scarred face was turned to him, the visage that had once been a pleasure to look upon. Came the rasping voice with no note, so changed was it by pain, recognizable to him who had known another voice in former years.

"Why *couldn't* I have bluffed you, when I knew you better than any other man ever did?" asked the gray man. "Here's something you've seen—how many times?—in the old minin' days.

"*Look!*"

Swiftly he uprolled his right sleeve. Tattooed upon the ghastly, scarred forearm, wasted by disease, showed the initials: "H. M."

"See?" asked the gray man. "The real Meigs is buried in a pauper's lot here in Toronto. He robbed me that night, after gettin' me drunk, an' he was in the forward sleeper with the bag, gettin' ready to hop off at Mohican, when the crash came. The third man in the deal was the first killed, tryin' to double-cross the others!

"You know me now, eh? So-long!"

Con Bagley, penniless, unable to pay for his room and meals, sat at the window, stupidly staring down at a meager gray, limping figure entering a taxicab to go to the station.

Mulling it over and over, he tried to realize the monstrous truth.

Big, virile, upstanding Herb Mason, whom he had lured to his last crime—changed by the hand of God to that body—

Which, nevertheless, contained a towering soul!

Tracing the Shadow

by Carolyn Wells

Author of "Vicky Van," etc.

CHAPTER XV.

WISE'S PIPE DREAM.

THE mystery was a baffling one. I learned from Pennington Wise that he had a pipe dream that Amory Manning had killed Amos Gately.

But, save for the faithful Zizi, he could find no one to share his suspicion. It was too absurd. In the first place, had Manning done the deed, he never would have hung around the scene of the crime, as he did, for nearly an hour. I remembered perfectly his demeanor and expression, as I saw him, with Olive Raynor that afternoon. He was deeply concerned, greatly shocked, and most considerate and thoughtful of Olive, but there was no shadow of guilt on his fine, strong face.

I had looked at him closely, both during the excitement of the tragedy itself, and later, as we were in the street car, and I noted his grave, serious countenance, but though he seemed puzzled and anxious, there was no mark of Cain on his brow—of that I was confident.

I told Wise this, and he listened, duly impressed, but, as he finally owned up, he saw no other way to look.

"It wasn't Rodman," he asserted; "that chap is a traitor and a spy, but he's no murderer. And, too, he was in cahoots with Gately, and the last thing he wanted was to lose his patron. It wasn't Sadie, of course; she too, wanted Gately alive, not dead. I know the unwillingness of

Olive's guardian to listen to Manning's suit seems a slight motive, yet where can we find a suspect with a stronger one?"

"We haven't as yet," I returned, "but there must be people implicated in that spy business—if that's a true bill against Gately—"

"Oh, it's a true bill, all right. Amos Gately was a wolf in sheep's clothing! Miss Raynor will have to know it sooner or later. She really knows it now, but she won't let herself believe it."

"What about that paper, Zizi took from Sadie Kent?"

"That's what I'm working on. Meet me this afternoon at the Raynor house, and I may be able to tell you."

The big, cheerful library at Olive's house had come to be our general meeting place of an afternoon. I usually dropped in there about four o'clock, and was pretty sure to find Wise or Rivers or both there. Zizi was a whole vaudeville show herself, and Olive was always cordial and hospitable, Mrs. Vail, too, was a gentle old lady, and I had grown to like her.

So, I went, as Wise had suggested, and found him poring over the paper.

Looking at it for the first time, I saw merely a lot of letters, pen-written, and arranged in long rows that ran clear across the sheet. There were perhaps twenty rows or so, and each row held about thirty letters. They were carefully aligned, and evenly spaced, and without doubt, contained a hidden message.

This story began in *The Argosy* for July 19.

"I've unraveled a lot of cryptograms in my time," said Wise, "but this isn't a cryptogram. I mean it isn't in cipher code—there's some other way of getting at it."

We all studied it. Olive, Zizi, Wise, and I bent our heads over the table where it lay, while Mrs. Vail looked on from a little distance, and babbled about some man she knew once, who could solve secret writings.

Suddenly Zizi jumped up, and running around the table, viewed the paper from the other side.

She cocked her funny little head sidewise, and then wagged it knowingly, as she took a few steps farther and looked at the paper from another angle. All round the table she went, and finally, with a murmur of apology took up the paper, and held it laterally in front of her eager eyes.

"Wheel!" she crowed in an ecstasy of satisfaction, "I've got it! You have to have a pattern to read it by."

"A pattern!" I repeated blankly.

"Yep! A paper with holes in it—a key paper."

"Oh!" and Wise looked as if a light had burst upon him. "That's it, Ziz! You're the wonder-child after all! Stoo-pid! Stoo-pid!" and he beat his forehead in self-abasement. "And, oh! I say, Brice, what did you tell me once about Swiss cheese?"

"Swiss cheese?"

"Yes; don't you remember? A carriage-call check—with holes in it."

"Oh, that thing. Yes, it was on Mr. Gately's desk—Hudson, the foxy detective took it."

"Can we get it?"

"Of course, by sending for it."

"I'll go!" cried Zizi. "Where? Headquarters?" and she was already flinging on her coat.

"Let her go," said Wise, giving the girl a quick, appreciative glance. "She'll beat any other messenger, and she'll find it."

We heard Zizi's imperative little voice demanding a cab from the telephone, and a bit later heard the street door close behind her.

"You see," and Wise explained it to us, "Zizi noticed—and then I did—these letters. At first glance they seem to be perfectly regular, but noted closely there are some, here and there, that are a microscopic fraction of space nearer or farther away than some others. And that shows what kind of a cipher it is. We may be mistaken about the carriage check, but I truly believe when we get it we can read the message this paper carried. We certainly can't without it."

This was so true that we laid the paper aside until the return of the winged Mercury.

She came soon, and waved triumphantly the perforated card she had gone for.

"Here you are!" she cried. "Let me try it as a reward for getting it."

"All right, go to it," said Wise, and flinging off her cape, Zizi bent over the puzzle.

"It's it! It's it!" she cried exultantly; "see, O, wise one!"

The detective took the paper and the card.

"You see," he said, generously sharing the first sight of the solution with us, "this card has seven holes, at irregular distances. By placing it in the right position on this solid bank of letters, certain ones show through the holes, and these—I hope—will spell the message."

And it did. After readjusting the key card several times, Wise finally got it right, and the letters that could be seen through the holes in the card, as he moved it along spelled coherent words and sentences. Of course, the other letters were not to be used.

He read the message aloud, and as we had suspected, it was information concerning the shipment of munitions, and told of certain sailing dates.

"Spy work of the cleverest type," Wise exclaimed; "you see, the Link got her information from stolen telegrams and recorded it in this way, so it would be unintelligible to any one not having this card, or a duplicate of it."

I scrutinized with interest the letters as they showed clearly through the little round holes.

"The information is of no particular value now, Wise said; "it refers to yesterday as the sailing date. The point is, that this card—this key card was found on—"

He paused; a glance at Olive's agonized face stopped the words he would have uttered. But we all knew. That card, found on Amos Gately's desk—or in his desk drawer, proved that he was implicated in the interception of these messages, and that he was guilty of treason to his country!

Wise tried to help matters by saying hastily: "Perhaps it was a plot! Perhaps this card was put where it was found by some sly scoundrel for the purpose of misleading—"

"Don't!" said Olive faintly; "you are kind, Mr. Wise, but you are saying that merely to give me a ray of comfort and hope. You know better. You believe—and I fear I must believe that my guardian was involved in some wrong—some grave wrong—and—"

She broke down utterly, and sobbed in Zizi's arms which were opened to receive her.

Feeling that our further stay was an intrusion, Rivers and I took leave, and Wise came along with us. We three went down to my rooms, and continued our confab without the embarrassment of Olive's presence.

"It's clearing itself up pretty quickly in some respects," Wise said, as he settled himself with a cigar, and passed the box to Rivers. I'm not so surprised as some at Gately's perfidy. It seems the government has been onto him for some time—at least, they suspected him, and were secretly investigating his private affairs. That Sadie person—"

"By the way, Wise," I interrupted him, "you sized her up perfectly! Did you ever hear about that, Rivers? Mr. Wise saw only the girl's hatpin, and from it he drew an exact portrait of the Link, herself. How did you do it, Wise? Tell us the details."

"Like all those deductions, it was simpler than it sounded," the detective said smiling. "You see, Mr. Rivers, the head of the pin was a big, good-looking scarab. I don't know yet whether it was a real

one, but if not, it was a first-class imitation. This argued a person of education and taste. The average young woman doesn't lean toward scarabs. Then, there was a short bit of a human hair caught in the setting. This was black, rather coarse and strong, denoting a healthy, buxom brunette. Hair is a clear indication of physical appearance, as a rule. That's how I know you aren't Amory Manning," he broke off suddenly and looked at Case Rivers. "I've had his description from Miss Raynor and from Brice, here, and they agree that Manning had dark, heavy hair—rather footballish type. Yours is light, fine, and a little scant. And you have all the characteristics that belong to it. Oh, yes, I admit I've been trying to fasten Manning's identity on you, but without success."

"Don't apologize," laughed Rivers. "I've been trying to connect up with the missing Manning, myself, but I can't work it. So, I'm out for the reward for finding that elusive individual. But, I fear, he's gone beyond recall."

"By the way," Wise put in, "I've found out who offers the reward. And, if you please, it's none other than the United States Government!"

"Why?" Rivers asked interestedly.

"Well, it seems Manning is—or was—a secret service man, and he was set on the trail of Amos Gately. He worked secretly, of course, and—"

"And he was kidnaped by Gately's friends!" I cried, "by some of Rodman's underlings, and put out of the way! I don't believe Manning is alive!"

"Go on about the hatpin, Mr. Wise, won't you?" urged Rivers. "I think I'm going to grow up to be a detective, and I'm taking notes."

"Well," said Wise good-humoredly, "as I remember it, I mentioned the lady's good teeth. This, because the prints on the rather soft gold of the pin were straight and even."

"You said she was proud of them," I put in.

"A glittering generality," and Wise laughed. "Aren't all girls proud of good teeth? Also, I assumed she had rather

flashy tastes, for the scarab, large, and of a bright, greenish-blue color, was not a quiet affair. A strong perfume clung to it, which also indicated a certain lack of refinement."

"And you said untidy habits," I reminded him.

"Because the pin was bent to crookedness. Also, it had been broken and mended, the break proving probable carelessness, and mending seemed to me to show that she was sentimentally fond of it, for it was skilfully mended and the cost of that would have bought a new one, I should judge. I assumed her to be somewhat intellectual to care so much for a scarab, and I deduced her fairly well off to own and to care for the rather valuable trinket.

"None of these deductions amounted to much by themselves, but the combination helped us to find a way to look for the owner. Of course, the cigarette stubs and the powder-paper helped, too. In fact, Miss Kent left pretty strong evidences of her call on Mr. Gately. But—she didn't kill him. Now, who did? We are learning lots of things, but not one shred of evidence have we yet found against any individual as the actual murderer."

"No," I agreed. "You see, the shadow of the head that I saw on the glass door couldn't have been Rodman's."

"And so, it may have been anybody's. I mean, it shows that heads look pretty much alike, when merely shadowed on a thick, waved glass."

"Yes," I mused, "it may have been anybody's. But whose? It seems as if we ought to have a suspect, by this time."

"I'll get you a suspect," spoke up Case Rivers. "I'm going into this thing for all I'm worth. The way lies through the Rodman crowd. The Link sold her information to Rodman and he took it to Gately, but of late, the Link became more bold and went straight to Gately herself. Now, there must be others concerned, and an interview with Miss Kent would give us an inkling of who they are. She's lost some of her bravado, by this time, I've no doubt, and I'm going to chase her up. Then, too, I want to go to Mr. Gately's office. I've never been there yet! Don't

think, Wise, that I'm butting in on your game, but sometimes two heads are better than one, if one is a nameless wanderer on the face of the earth."

"All right, Rivers," and Wise nodded genially, "go in and win. We're together on this matter. And when it's over, I'm going to take up your case, and see just how, when, and where you fell through the earth."

"I wish you would," and Rivers looked earnestly at the detective, "for I see that trip every night in my dreams. I see myself falling through—oh, I won't bore you with that same old story!"

"It doesn't bore me, but just now we'll put all our energies on the present puzzle. We must get Gately's murderer, and then we must get Amory Manning."

"Zizi says—" I began.

"I know she does," returned Wise, looking thoughtful. "Zizi says Manning is the murderer. But the kid has no reason to say it but a hunch. She's a witch, though, for hunches, and I keep her idea in mind."

"No," and Rivers spoke positively. "It doesn't seem to me that Manning is the murderer. If he was in the secret service, he may be purposely in hiding now, for some reason entirely unconnected with Amos Gately's murder."

"Very likely," assented Wise, "only as I say, I often remember Zizi's notions because they so often pan out correct."

"She's a marvel, that child," said Rivers; "where'd you get her?"

"She's my model. In civilian life, I'm by way of being an artist, you know. I sketch her over and over, but never have I successfully caught her smile. She's a witch child, a sprite."

"Yes; she seems gipsy born. But clever! And of a charm."

"All that," agreed Wise. "And a good little thing. Devoted to me, like a faithful dog, and yet, absolutely impersonal. Oh, I couldn't get along without Ziz."

And almost as he spoke the door opened and Zizi came gliding in. Her mode of entering a room was one of her individual characteristics. She slid in softly and unobtrusively, yet one was at once aware of her. It seemed to electrify the atmosphere,

and the place was brighter and more vital in feeling. She moved across the room as quietly as a shadow; she said no word, yet her whole presence spoke.

"Hello, Ziz," and Wise smiled at her. "Watcha want?"

"Mr. Rivers," she replied flashing her black eyes at him. "Miss Olive sent me. And she wants the other crystal."

"A new mystery?" and Wise laughed. "I can't see through the other crystal! Has it to do with a pair of glasses?"

"No," and Rivers took out a pocket-book, from which he extracted some flimsy papers. These proved to be tracings of snow crystals similar to those I had seen him draw while he was still in the hospital.

"How lovely!" Zizi exclaimed, as she took the traced patterns. "You see," and she showed them to Wise, "Miss Olive is making lace work—and Mr. Rivers makes her these patterns. Aren't they exquisite?"

They were. They were forms of snow crystals, than which there is nothing more beautiful, and Rivers had adapted and combined them into a delicate, lacelike pattern, which Olive was to carry with linen threads, or whatever women use to make lace out of.

"I was going to take them round," Rivers said; "I hope the delay hasn't bothered Miss Raynor."

"Oh, no," Zizi assured him, "but she is impatient to see this new design and couldn't wait. So I offered to run down here for it. I knew you were here."

"But I'm just going up to Miss Raynor's," Rivers spoke as if disappointed. "And the patterns are my only excuse for a call! So, if you please, Miss Zizi, I'll take them to the impatient lady, and I'll go at once."

"I think she's gone out, Mr. Rivers—she was about to go as I left. If you telephone you'll likely catch her."

Quite unembarrassed at our knowing smiles, Rivers took up my desk telephone and called Olive's number. While waiting for the response he picked up a pencil from my pen-tray, and idly drew a snow crystal on the big desk blotter.

I watched him, for his skill fascinated me. He drew the dainty six-sided figure with the accuracy of a designer. The tiny

fronds, all six alike, made a lovely hexagonal form as it grew beneath his fingers.

He was apparently unconscious of what he was doing, and drew without thinking, for he spoke to us several times while waiting for the desired connection.

At last Olive answered him, and he dropped the pencil and talked to her. In a wheedlesome mood, he persuaded her to defer her proposed errand until he could join her, and accompany her. The kindly familiarity with which he carried on the conversation and the jaunty assurance he showed that she would accede to his request proved to us, listeners perforce, that there was good comradeship between them.

Rivers hung up the receiver, and turned to me with a boyish smile. "I'm going now," he said. "Miss Raynor is waiting for me. I'll see you again, to-night, Brice." And with a nod of farewell he went off.

Zizi sat staring at my desk.

The strange child was thinking of something—more, she had made some discovery, or had sensed some new information.

She leaned over the desk, her outstretched hands resting on the big blotter and her black eyes wide with an expression of surprised fear.

"Look!" she cried; "look!"

But her slender finger pointed only to the snow-crystal that Rivers had drawn. It was a graceful figure, not only finished, but a delicate tracery of one of the myriad forms that snow-crystals show. How often I had looked at the lovely things as they rested for a moment on my dark coat sleeve when I was out in a snow storm. And after seeing Rivers draw them so skillfully, several times, they had taken on a new interest to me. But what had so moved Zizi I could not imagine. It was as if the little drawing were fraught with some dreadful significance of which I knew nothing.

Nor was Pennington Wise any more aware than I of the girl's meaning.

He smiled quizzically, and said: "Well, Zizi, girl, what's hypnotizing you? That drawing of Rivers's?"

"Yes," and Zizi turned her big, black eyes from my face to Wise's; and gave a queer little sigh.

"Out with it, girly," urged Wise. "Tell your old Penny what's the matter."

"Will you do what I want?" she asked, her voice tense and thrilled with strong feeling.

"Yes; to the limit."

"Then look at that snow crystal!"

"Yes, I've looked," and after a moment's close scrutiny, Wise turned his eyes again to the eery face, so vividly emotional, so white with that unnamed fear.

"You look, too, Mr. Brice," and I did.

"Note the design," Zizi went on. "See just how the fronds are marked."

"Oh, come now, Zizi," and Penny Wise patted her arm. "You're putting up a game on us. We know Rivers draws those things beautifully. Why act as if you never knew it before?"

"Come with me," and Zizi rose and began to put her long black cloak round her, shivering with excitement as she did so. "You come, too, Mr. Brice."

We obeyed the strange child, for I remembered how Pennington Wise respected what he called her "hunches," and before going down-stairs she directed that I call a taxicab.

In the cab, she said nothing, having already bade us go to Amos Gately's office, and arrange to get into the rooms.

And then, when we were there, when I had obtained the key from the bank people and entered the dim, quiet rooms, Zizi went straight to the middle room, straight to Amos Gately's desk, and lifting the telephone from where it stood on the big desk blotter, she disclosed the exact counterpart of the snow crystal we had seen drawn at my desk by Case Rivers!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SNOW-FLAKE.

I LOOKED at the design with interest, but without, at first, grasping its true significance.

Pennington Wise looked at it, aghast. "Where did it come from?" he exclaimed.

"It's always been there," said Zizi. "I mean, I saw it there one day when I was in this room with Mr. Hudson. I—I—"

"Didn't know you'd ever been here, Ziz," and Wise smiled at the earnest little face.

"Yep, I was; and I happened to move the telephone, and under it was that drawing. I didn't think anything about it, as evidence, but I looked at it 'cause it was so pretty. And I put the telephone back over it again."

"But I searched this room," and Wise looked mystified.

"You probably didn't lift the telephone, then," Zizi returned, shaking her elfin head, while a deep sorrow showed in her black eyes.

"I don't believe I did," Wise mused, thinking back. I did pick up most of the desk fittings to examine them, but I suppose I didn't take hold of the telephone at all. There seemed no reason to do so."

"Course not!" Zizi was always ready to defend Wise's actions. "How could you know there was a picture under it? But, oh, Penny, what does it mean?"

"Wait—let's get at it carefully. On the face of it, it would seem as if Case Rivers must have drawn this figure of a snow crystal. Everybody has some peculiar habit, and especially, lots of people have a habit of drawing some particular thing when waiting at a telephone.

"I've asked half a dozen men of late, and every one says he scribbles words or draws some crude combination of lines. But each one says he always does the same thing, whatever it may be. Now, I imagine, very few men draw snow crystals—and fewer still draw them with this degree of perfection. Again, granting they did, would any other individual draw this identical design, with this accuracy of drawing, that Case Rivers drew on the desk blotter at your house, Brice?"

"I should say it would be impossible that any one else could have done it," I replied, honestly, though I began to see where our investigation was leading us.

"It is impossible," declared Wise. "Two men might draw snow crystals, but they would not both choose this particular one."

"It's exactly the same," Zizi murmured, "for I brought Mr. Brice's with me; here it is."

Calmly, the girl took from her little hand-bag a piece torn from my desk blotter. It held the drawing done by Rivers while he was waiting for his telephone call and it was the precise duplicate of the figure drawn on the blotter of Amos Gately's mahogany desk.

"The same pencil—or, rather, the same hand drew those two," Wise said positively, and I could not contradict this.

Snow-crystals are said by scientists to show hundreds of different shapes, and almost any illustrated dictionary or text-book of natural science shows several specimens. This one we were looking at was of simple but beautiful design, and I felt sure Rivers had copied it from some picture as one can rarely keep a real snowflake long enough to copy its form.

Anyway it was stretching the law of coincidence a little too far to believe that two men would draw the same form on a desk blotter while telephoning.

Of course this sketch on Amos Gately's desk need not have been made while the artist's other hand held the telephone receiver, but its juxtaposition to the instrument indicated that it was.

"Of course Mr. Rivers drew this," Zizi declared, her little head bobbing as she turned her black eyes from one to the other of us.

She wore a small turban made entirely of red feathers—soft breast feathers of some tropical bird, I suppose. The hat set jauntily on her sleek black hair, and the motions of her head were so quick and bird-like, that she gave me a fleeting remembrance of the human birds I saw in the play of "Chantecler."

"Of course he did," assented Wise, very gravely; "and now we must go on. Granting, for the moment, that Case Rivers—as we call him—drew this little sketch, he must have been in this office the day of Amos Gately's murder. For I've made sure that the blotter on this desk was changed every day, and any marks or blots now on it were therefore made on that day. If he did it, then—or, rather, when he did it—he was telephoning to somebody—"

"Well," put in Zizi, "perhaps he was just sitting here, talking to Mr. Gately.

Maybe, he might draw those things when he just sits idly as well as when he telephones."

"Yes; you're right. Well, at any rate, he must have been sitting here, opposite Mr. Gately, on that very day. And I believe he was telephoning, but that makes no difference. Now, if he was here, in this office, on that day—what was he here for, and who is he?"

"He is the murderer," said Zizi, but she spoke as if she were a machine. The words seemed to come from her lips without her own volition; her voice was wooden, mechanical, and her eyes had a far-away, vacant gaze. "I don't know who he is, but he is the man who shot Mr. Gately."

"Oh, come, now, Zizi," Wise shook her gently. "Wake up! Don't jump at conclusions. He may be the most innocent man in New York. He may have been in here calling on Gately early in the day, and his errand may have been of the most casual sort. He may have had cause to telephone, and as he sat waiting for his call, he sketched the snowflake pattern, which is his habit when waiting. But that he *was* here that day is a positive fact—to my mind. Now, it's for us to find out what he was here for, and who he is. I don't favor going to him and asking him pointblank. That peculiar phase of amnesia from which he is suffering is a precarious matter to deal with. A sudden shock might bring back his lost memory—or, it might—"

"Addle his brain!" completed Zizi. "All right, O most Wise guy! But when you do find out the truth, it will be that Case Rivers in his right mind and in his own proper person killed Mr. Gately."

"Hush up, Ziz! If you have such a fearful hunch keep it to yourself. I'm not going to believe that, unless I have to! It has always been my conviction that Rivers is—or was, a worth-while man. I feel sure he was of importance in some line—some big line. Moreover, I believe his yarn about falling through the earth."

"You do!" I cried in amazement. "You stand for that! You believe he fell into the globe at Canada—or some northern country, and fell out again in New York City?"

"Not quite that," and Wise smiled. "But I believe he had some mighty strange experience, of which his tale is a pretty fair description, if not entirely the literal truth."

"Such as?"

"Why, suppose he fell down a mine shaft, in Canada. Suppose that knocked out his memory. Then suppose he was rescued, and sent to New York for treatment, say, at some private hospital or sanitarium. Then suppose he escaped, and, still loony, threw himself into the East River—oh, I don't know—only, there are lots of ways that he could have that notion about his fall through the earth, and have something real to base it on."

"Gammon and spinach!" I remarked, my patience exhausted. "The man had a blow or a fall or something that jarred his memory, but his 'falling through the earth' idea is a hallucination, pure and simple. However, that doesn't matter. Now we must follow this new trail, and see if we can get a line on his personality. He can't tell us what he was here for—if he doesn't remember that he was here."

"Perhaps he does remember," Wise spoke musingly.

"Nixy!" and Zizi's saucy head nodded positively. "Mr. Rivers is sincere now, whatever he was before. He doesn't remember shooting Mr. Gately—"

"Stop that, Zizi!" Wise spoke more sharply than I had ever heard him. "I forbid you to assume that Rivers is the murderer—you are absurd!"

"But I've got a hunch—" Zizi's black eyes stared fixedly at Wise, "and—"

"Keep your hunch to yourself! I told you that before! Now, hush up."

Not at all abashed, Zizi made a most wicked little *moue* at him, but she said no more just then.

"We have a new direction in which to look, though," Wise went on, "and we must get about it. You remember, we found a hatpin here that led us to Sadie, the Link, as straight as a sign-board could have done."

"Yes," scoffed Zizi, "with the help of Norah and her powder-paper, and Jenny and her tattle-tongue!"

"All right." Wise was unperturbed.

"We got her all the same. Now, perhaps the man who fell through the earth also left some indicative clues. Let's look round."

"He couldn't leave anything more indicative than the drawing on the blotter," persisted Zizi. "He drew on Mr. Brice's blotter to-day and he drew on this blotter of Mr. Gately's the day Mr. Gately was killed. That much is certain."

"So it is, Zizi," agreed Wise; "but nothing further is certain as yet. But we may find something more."

As he talked the detective rummaged in the desk drawers. He pulled out the packet of papers that had interested him before.

"I'd like to read these," he said; "you see, they're dated in chronological order, and they must mean something."

"It's where they come from," said Zizi, with an air of wisdom; "you see, Spitz-Charlton means a certain message in their code-book, and St. Dunstan means another, Giltmore paper means another, and so on."

"Right you are, as usual," Wise said, so approvingly that Zizi smiled all over her queer little countenance.

"Part of the Link's spy business," she went on, and I cried out in denial.

"Oh, come off, Mr. Brice," she said, "you may as well admit, first as last, that you know Mr. Gately was mixed up in this spy racket. I don't know yet, just how deeply, or how knowingly—"

"You mean," I caught at the straw, "that he was a go-between, but didn't know it?"

"I thought that at first," said Wise, "I hoped it was so. That of course, would argue that he was infatuated with Sadie, and she wound him around her finger and used him to further her schemes while he himself was innocent. But the theory, though a pretty one, won't work. Gately wasn't quite gullible enough for that, and, too, he is more deeply concerned in it all than we know."

"Yes," I agreed, "these letters—I mean, these blank sheets were sent to him by mail. One came the day after he died."

"I know it. And as Zizi says, they mean something definite in accordance with a prepared code. For instance, a sheet of

Hotel Amsterdam paper, dated December 10, might mean that a certain transport, indicated in the code-book by that hotel, was to sail on that date."

"That's a simple, child's-play explanation," said Zizi, "but it may be the right one."

"Certainly," Wise assented, "there may be other explanations and more complicated ones. But it doesn't matter now. The receipt of these letters—blank letters, was of secret value to Gately, and proves him to have been pretty deeply mixed up in it all."

"But what about Mr. Rivers?" spoke up Zizi. "Where does he come in?"

"It looks black," Wise declared; "he was here that day secretly. That is, he didn't come in at Jenny's door. She doesn't recognize him, for I asked her. Therefore, he came in by one of these other doors, or up in the secret elevator. In either case, he didn't want his visit known. So he is a wrong-doer, with Gately, and—probably, with Rodman. They're all tarred with the same brush. The trail of the spy serpent is over them all."

"No!" cried Zizi, and her face was stormy. "My nice Mr. Rivers isn't any spy! He hasn't anything to do with that spy matter!"

"Why!" I exclaimed. "You said he was the murderer!"

"Well, I'd rather be a murderer than a spy!" Her eyes snapped and her whole thin little body quivered with indignation. "A murder is a decent crime compared to spy work! Oh, my nice Mr. Rivers!"

She broke down and cried convulsively.

"Let her alone," said Wise, not unkindly, after a brief glance at the shaking little figure. "She's always better for a crying spell. It clears her atmosphere. Now, Brice, let's get busy. As Zizi says, you must admit that there's no doubt that Amos Gately was pretty deeply into the game. Even if he was unduly friendly with Sadie Kent, it was indubitably through and because of their dealings together in the stolen telegram business."

"The way I see it, is that Sadie sold her intercepted messages to the highest bidder. This was George Rodman, but above him

was Amos Gately. Oh, don't look so incredulous. It isn't the first time a bank president has gone wrong—on the side. Gately never was unfaithful to his office, he never misappropriated funds or anything of that sort, but for some reason or other, whether money gain, or hope of other reward, he did betray his country."

I couldn't deny it—or, rather, I could deny it, but only because of my still unshattered faith in Amos Gately. I could bring no proof of my denial.

"But," I said musingly, "we haven't yet proved Gately mixed up in—"

"What!" cried Wise. "Isn't this enough proof? These blank letters, for that's what they are—the proved visit here of Sadie, the Link, and the fact that Gately was shot—by some one—with no known reason—all that goes to show that the murderer had some secret motive, some unknown cause for getting Gately out of the way."

"I see it, as you put it," I said, "but I will not believe Amos Gately a spy—or conniving at spy business until I have to. I shall continue to believe he was a tool—an innocent tool, of the Rodman and Sadie Kent combination."

"All right, Brice, keep your faith as long as you can, but, I can tell you, you'll soon have to admit that I'm right. Gately, as we all know, was a peculiar man. He had few friends, he had little or no social life, and he did have secret callers and a secret mode of entrance and exit from his offices. All this shows something to hide—it is unexplainable for a man who has nothing to conceal."

"All right, Wise," I said finally, "I suppose you *are* right. But still we must continue our search for the murderer. We don't seem to progress much in that matter."

"Not yet, but soon," Wise said optimistically; "the ax is laid at the root of the tree—we are on the right track—"

"Meaning Case Rivers?" I cried in alarm.

"Meaning Case Rivers—perhaps," he returned. "I'm not as sure as Zizi is that the evidence points to him as the murderer, but we must conclude that he was in this

room the day of the murder—and what else could he have been here for?"

"What else?" I stormed. "Dozens of things! Hundreds of things! Why, man alive, every person who set foot in this room on that day didn't necessarily kill Amos Gately!"

"Every person who set foot in this room on that day is his potential murderer," Wise returned calmly. "Every person must be suspected—or, at least, investigated".

"Well," I said, after realizing that he spoke truly, "you investigate the question of Rivers's visit here that day. I don't want to do that. But I'm going down to headquarters now, and perhaps I'll dig up something of importance."

And I did. A visit to the chief told me the interesting tale of further discoveries of Sadie Kent's industries. It seems they had discovered a complete and powerful wireless station in a cottage at Southeast Beach, a fairly popular summer resort. The cottage was seemingly untenanted, but some unexplained wires which ran along the rafters of an adjoining house led to the discovery of the auxiliary wireless station.

Experts had broken into the locked house and had found a cleverly concealed keyboard of a wireless apparatus. Further search had disclosed the whole thing, and, moreover, had brought out the fact that the adjoining cottage was occupied by two apparently innocent old people, who were really in the employ of Sadie Kent.

The Link was a person of importance, and though she passed for a mere telegraph operator, she was one of the most important links in the German spy system in the United States.

In the room where the wireless apparatus was found, there were also quantities of letter-paper from the various hotels of New York City.

These sheets, abstracted from the writing rooms of the hotels, constituted the code system used in forwarding the stolen intelligence.

It all hung together, and the bunch of those hotel papers found in Gately's desk, and, especially the fact that one reached his address the day after his demise, proved

beyond all doubt his implication in the despicable business.

Now, I thought, to what extent or in what way, was Case Rivers concerned? Surely the man had been in Gately's office on that fatal day. I had no idea that he had killed the banker—that was only Zizi's foolishness—but he had certainly been there.

It came to me suddenly that if Rivers could be taken again to the Gately offices, the rooms, the associations, would, in all probability, bring back his lost memory, and let him reinstate himself in his real personality. To be sure, this might prove him the murderer, but if so, it would be only the course of justice; and, on the other hand, if it explained his innocent or casual call on Gately, that, too, was what the man deserved.

And so, I went at once to see Rivers. I found him in his rooms, the ones he had taken while he was to assist Wise in his work, and he greeted me cordially.

"The plot thickens," he said, as I told him of Sadie's wireless station. "I knew that girl was a big one. She's one of the important people in the big spy web. She's one of their spiders, who spin a pretty web and attract gullible flies. Amos Gately fell for her charms—you know, Brice, she is a siren—and somehow she lured him into the web she so deftly spun. To my mind, Gately was a good, upright citizen, who fell for a woman's wiles. I'm not sure about this, it may be he was mixed up in the spy work before Sadie came on the scene—but I'm certain she was accessory before, during, or after the fact."

"Accessory to his murder?" I asked.

"Not necessarily; but strongly accessory to his wrong-doing in the matter of treason. I think she, for a time, worked Gately through Rodman, but, latterly, she grew bolder, or found she could do more by personal visits, and she came and went, by the secret elevator, pretty much as she chose."

"I hate to have Miss Raynor know this," I said, with a covert glance at Rivers, to see how he took the remark.

"So do I," he said, as frankly as a boy; "I may as well tell you, Brice, that I love that girl. She is, to me, the very crown of

womanhood. I have worshiped her from the first moment I saw her. But, understand, I have no hopes—no aspirations. I shall never offer my hand and heart to any woman, while I have no name to offer. And I shall never have a name. If I haven't yet discovered my own identity I never can. No, I'm no pessimist, and I know that some time, some sudden shock might restore my memory all in a minute, yet I can't bank on such a possibility.

"I've talked this over with Rankin—he's the doctor who's following up my case—time and again. He says that a sudden and a very forcible shock is needed to restore my memory, and that it may come in my lifetime, and—it may not. He says it can't be forced or brought about knowingly—it will have to be a coincidence—a happening that will jar the inert cells of my brain—or, something like that—I don't remember the scientific terms."

Rivers passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

I was in a quandary. I had gone to see the man with full purpose of luring him to Gately's office and confronting him with the sketched snowflake on the blotting pad. Now, since he had confided to me his love for Olive Raynor, I shrank from doing anything that might prove him to be Amos Gately's murderer. For I was fond of Miss Raynor, in a deeply respectful and unpretentious fashion. And I had noticed several things of late that made me feel pretty sure that her friendship for Rivers was true and deep, if, indeed, it were not something more than friendship. This, to be sure, would argue but a fickle loyalty to the memory of Amory Manning, but as Norah and I agreed, when talking it over, Miss Raynor had never shown any desperate grief at Manning's disappearance—at least, not more than the loss of a casual friend might arouse.

But I knew where my duty lay. And so, I said: "Rivers, I wish you'd go round to Mr. Gately's office with me. Don't you think that if you were there—and you never have been—you might chance upon some clue that has escaped the notice of Wise or Hudson or myself?"

"Right-o!" he said. "I've thought my-

self, I'd like to go there. Not, as you politely suggest, to find overlooked clues, but just as a matter of general interest. I'm out, you know, to find the murderer—and also to trace the vanished Amory Manning."

CHAPTER XVII.

ZIZI'S HUNCH.

"HE'S afraid," and Norah wagged her head sagaciously, while her gray eyes had an apprehensive expression.

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid of the truth. You see, Mr. Brice, our friend Rivers is nobody's fool. He's onto most points regarding this case, and now, he's getting onto himself. That astute little scrap of humanity, Zizi, knows he is. Of course, living with Miss Raynor as she does, she has opportunities every day to see Mr. Rivers, for he's eternally hanging around the Raynor house. Oh, I don't mean he's an idler; not by a long shot. On the contrary, his middle name is efficiency! He puts over a lot of work in a day."

"What sort of work, and how do you know so much about him?"

We were in my office, waiting for Rivers, who had promised to come to see me, and to look into the Gately rooms. It was now nearly half an hour after the time he had set for his call, and as it was not his habit to be tardy, I was surprised. I had begun to look upon Rivers as a man of importance not only in the matters with which we were associated, but he showed so much general ability and force of character that I wondered who or what he would turn out to be. For I felt sure he would find himself, and even if he never discovered who he had been, he would make a new name and a well-worth-while individuality for himself yet.

Norah, too, admired him, and seemed to know as much of his capabilities, or more, than I did myself.

"I don't know just what sort of work, but I think it's connected with the mysteries we're up against ourselves. And I know about him, because Zizi tells me. She sees everything he does—when she's with him, I mean. Not a gesture or motion escapes her

notice. And she's watching his attitude toward Miss Raynor. She says—Zizi does—that Mr. Rivers is over head and ears in love with Olive, but he won't tell her so because he is, as he puts it, a self-named man! Zizi heard him call himself that, when talking to Miss Raynor, and then he just looked away, and resolutely changed the subject.

"But she thinks—Zizi does—that he's working night and day to find out who he is, and she's sure he'll find out. And also, he's working to find Mr. Gately's murderer, and he's hunting for Amory Manning."

"Well, why is he afraid to come here?"

"I'm not sure that he is; but you know, Zizi has a hunch that he's the murderer, and I think, maybe he is. That snowflake sketch proves he was there that day, and as his presence isn't accounted for, why may he not have been the slayer? And, why may he not have an inkling or a suspicion of it, and dread to verify his fears?"

"But, good gracious, Norah, even granting he was in Gately's office that day, he needn't have done the shooting. There are about one million other errands he could have been there on. Perhaps he was a commercial traveler, selling laces, and drew the design for a sample."

"Sometimes, Mr. Brice, you talk like a tom-noddy! Drummer, indeed! I can tell you whatever calling Case Rivers followed before he fell through the earth, it was far superior to that of a selling agent! I'll bet he was a lawyer, at least!"

"At least!" I mocked her. "Understand, pray, I consider my profession somewhat above the *least* of the professions!"

"Yes, for *you* dignify it to a high standing," and the gray eyes flashed me the smile of appreciation that I was looking for. I may as well admit that I was growing very fond of those two gray eyes and their owner, and I had a pretty strong conviction that after the present case was all settled, I should turn my attention to the winning of the exclusive right to the tender glances those eyes could give.

But just now I had to exclude all distracting thoughts, and, forcing my mind back to the present situation, I again marveled at the non-appearance of Case Rivers.

"Perhaps he's fallen through the earth again," Norah suggested. By the way, Mr. Brice, what do you think about that fall? Mr. Rivers is, no doubt, under some strange hallucination; but, all the same, may there not be some foundation on which he based his dream?"

"May be! There must be! That mind of his is too sure-fire to hang on so desperately to a mere dream. He had some experience of a strange nature, and it included something that he looks upon as falling through the earth."

"Such as—"

"I don't know. But I've a vague idea of a motor accident. Say, a motor-car ran into a stone wall, and he was hurled high in the air and landed in the East River—"

"But I don't see how that implies falling through the earth."

"Well, say he slid down a high bank to reach the river—"

"There's no high bank near the Morgue, and he was fished out in that locality."

"But he needn't have fallen in there! In fact, he couldn't have. He must have floated or drifted a considerable distance to have had his clothing torn off him, and to have reached the state of exhaustion and freezing that so nearly culminated in death."

"Yes; but even yet you haven't suggested anything like falling through the earth."

"All right, Miss Smarty; what's your idea? I see you're dying to spring something."

"Only what I've thought from the beginning. I believe he was in some cold country—Canada or somewhere—and fell down through a mine-shaft or into a deep, old well, or perhaps merely an excavation for a new, large building. But, anyway, whatever it was, his last impression was of falling down into the ground. Then, when he struck, he was knocked unconscious. Then he was taken to a hospital or somewhere, and as the fall had utterly blotted out his memory, he was kept in confinement. Then, somehow, he broke loose and came to New York—or maybe he was brought to New York for treatment by the doctors and he got away, and either threw himself into the river or fell in accidentally,

and when he was rescued, he still remembered the fall, but nothing else concerning his disaster."

"Good enough, Norah, as a theory. But seems to me, in that case, he would have been sought and found by the people who had him in charge."

"Ah, that's the point of it all! They don't want to find him! They know just where he is, and all about him, but they won't tell, for it suits their base purposes to have him lost!"

"Well, you *have* cooked up a scheme! And he killed Amos Gately?"

"Maybe; but if so, he did it unknowingly. Perhaps these people who are looking after him secretly hypnotized him to do it—"

"Oh, Norah! Come off! Pray desist! Let up! Next thing you know, you'll be having him in the movies! For you never thought up all that stuff without getting hints for it from some slapstick melodrama!"

"Oh, well, people who are absolutely without imagination can't expect to see into a mystery! But you won't see any Mr. Rivers this morning—I can assure you of that!"

She turned to her typewriter and I took up my telephone.

I could not get Rivers at his home address, and I next called up Miss Raynor.

She replied in agitated tones that Rivers had been to see her for a few minutes, and that he had left half an hour before. She begged me to come around at once.

Of course I went.

I found her in a strange state of mind. She seemed like one who had made a discovery, and was fearful of inadvertently disclosing it.

But when I urged her to be frank, she insisted she had nothing to conceal.

"I don't know anything, Mr. Brice; truly I don't," she repeated. "I mean anything new or anything that I haven't told you. Mr. Rivers was here this morning for a very short call. He said that while his memory had not returned, he had a queer mental impression of being on a search for a paper when he fell through the earth."

"Did he go down into the earth to seek the paper?" I asked, thinking it better to treat the matter lightly.

"No," she returned in all seriousness; "but he believes he was commissioned to hunt out a valuable paper of some sort, and while on the quest he fell through the earth by accident. It was the shock of that that impaired his memory."

"Sufficient cause!" I couldn't help saying.

Olive bristled. "Oh, I know you don't believe in his fall-through-the-earth story—almost nobody does; but I do."

"So do I!" And Zizi was in the room. One could never say of that girl that she entered or came in; she just was there, in that silent, mysterious way of hers. And then, with equally invisible motions, she was sitting opposite me, at Olive's side, on a low ottoman.

"I know Mr. Rivers very well," Zizi announced, as if she were his official sponsor, "and what he says is true, no matter how unbelievable it may sound. He says he fell through the earth, and so he *did* fall through the earth, and that's all there is about *that*!"

"Good for you, Zizi!" I cried. "You're a loyal little champion! And just how did he accomplish the feat?"

"It will be explained in due season," and Zizi's big, black eyes took on a sibylline expression as she gazed straight at me. If you were told on good authority that a man had crossed the ocean in an airplane, you'd believe it, wouldn't you?"

"Yes; but that doesn't seem to be a parallel case," I demurred.

"Neither is Case Rivers a parallel case," Zizi giggled; "but he's the real thing in the way of earth fallers. And when you know all, you'll know everything!"

The child was exasperating in her foolish retorts, and yet so convincing was the determined shake of her little black head that I was almost tempted to believe in her statements.

"You're a baby sphinx, Zizi," and Olive looked at her affectionately. "But honestly, Brice, she keeps my spirits up; and she is so positive herself of what she says, that she almost convinces me. As for Mrs. Vail,

she swallows everything Zizi says for law and gospel!"

"And just what is it you say now, Zizi?" I asked.

"Nothin' much, kind sir. Only that Crse Rivers is a gentleman and a scholar, that his memory is on the home stretch and humming along, and that if he's after a paper, he'll get it!"

"And incidentally he's Amos Gately's—"

A scream of agony from Zizi interrupted my speech, and jumping to her feet she danced round the room, her forefinger thrust between her red lips, and her little, eery face contorted as with pain.

"Oh, what is it, Zizi?" cried Olive, running to the frantic girl.

Mrs. Vail, hearing the turmoil, came running in, and she and Olive held Zizi between them, begging to know how she was hurt.

Catching an opportunity, Zizi looked at me over Mrs. Vail's shoulder, and the message shot from her eyes was fully as understandable as if she had spoken. It said: "Do not mention any hint of Case Rivers's possible connection with the Gately murder, and do not mention the snowflake drawn on the blotter in Mr. Gately's office."

Yes, quite a lengthy and comprehensive speech to be made without words; but the speaking black eyes said it as clearly as lips could have done.

I nodded my obedience, and then Zizi giggled, and with her inimitable impudence she turned to Olive and said: "I'm like the *White Queen* in 'Alice'; I haven't pricked my finger yet, but I probably shall, some day."

"What were you screaming about, then?" asked Mrs. Vail, inclined to be angry, while Olive looked amused and mystified.

"Emergency," and Zizi grinned at her. "First aid to the injured; or, rather, prevention, which is worth a pound of first aid!"

"You're crazy!" said Mrs. Vail, a little annoyed at being fooled so. "I thought you were nearly killed!"

"When you knew a lady once who was nearly killed, did she yell like that?" asked Zizi with an innocent smile.

"Yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Vail. "But how did you know I once saw a lady nearly killed?"

"Mind-reading!" replied Zizi. And then Pennington Wise arrived, and we all shamelessly ignored Mrs. Vail and her yarns to listen to his report.

"There's a lot doing," he said. "And," he added gently, "I'm sorry to bring you unpleasant news, Miss Raynor, but you'll have to know sooner or later—"

"I do know," said Olive bravely. "You're going to tell me my guardian was—was not a good man."

"That is so; it is useless to try to soften the truth. Amos Gately was the receiver of important Government secrets, learned by Sadie Kent, the telegrapher. She carried them to Rodman, who, in turn, transmitted them to Gately, who, it seems, had a way of getting the information to the enemy. Of course, the secret wireless station, recently discovered, was used, as well as other means of communication. I won't go into details, Miss Raynor, but Amos Gately was 'the man higher up,' who thought himself safe from discovery because of his unimpeachable reputation for integrity, and also because of the infinite precautions he had taken. Indeed, if he had not fallen a victim to the personal charms of the Link, his share in the wrong might never have been learned."

Olive listened to all this, white-faced and still, her lips a tense, drawn line of scarlet, her expression a stony calm.

Zizi, watching her closely and with loving care, slipped her little brown paw into Olive's hand, and noted with satisfaction the faint smile.

"Perhaps," Olive said after a thoughtful pause, "it is as well, then, that Uncle Amos did not—live to be—disgraced."

"It is," said Wise gravely. "He would have faced a Federal prison had it all been discovered while he lived. That will be Rodman's fate, if he is not held for the crime of murder. And I think he will not be. For his alibi clears him, and it was to escape the graver charge that he has told so much of the spy business."

"And so," I said, "we are as far as ever from the discovery of the murderer?"

"You never can tell," Wise returned. "It may be we are on the very eve of solving the mystery. Rivers is on the war-path—"

"I think I ought to tell you, Mr. Wise," Olive broke in, "that Mr. Rivers was here this morning, and he seems to have a slight glimmer of returning memory."

"He has? Good! Then it will all come back to him. I've been looking up this aphasia-amnesia business, and quite often when the patient begins to recover his memory, it all comes back to him with a bang! Where is Rivers?"

"He went away—I don't know where." Olive's lip quivered, and so plainly did she show her feelings that we all saw at once she feared that Rivers had fled *because* of his returning memory.

"It's all right," declared Zizi stanchly. "Mr. Rivers is white clear through! He'll come back soon, and he'll bring the paper he's after."

"What paper?" demanded Wise.

"The poipers! the poipers!" scoffed Zizi. "Did you ever know a case, O Wise guy, that didn't revolve round and hinge on a poiper? Well, the dockyments in the case is what he's a soichin' for! See?"

When Zizi acted the gamin, she was irresistibly funny, and we all laughed, which was what she wanted, to lighten the strain of the situation.

Rivers was a mystery, indeed. Every one of us, I think, felt that he might be connected with the Gately affair. All of us, that is, but Olive—and who could tell what she thought?

But Pennington Wise had a question to ask, and he put it straightforwardly:

"That day you were lured to Sadie the Link's house, Miss Raynor," he began, "you said, or, rather, you agreed, when Rodman said you were his *fiancée*. Will you tell us why?"

Olive flushed, but more with anger than embarrassment.

"The man threatened me," she said. "He first tried to make love to me, and when I repulsed him he told me that unless I would promise to marry him, he would tell something that would be a living re-

proach to the memory of my dead guardian. I declared he could say nothing against Amos Gately. Then he whispered that Mr. Gately was a spy! I couldn't believe it, and—yet, I had seen just a few things—had heard just a few words, that filled my heart with fear that Mr. Rodman was speaking the truth. So I thought I'd better say what he asked me to—though I knew I'd kill myself rather than ever marry him. But I wasn't greatly afraid, except that I knew I was in his power. Oh, I don't like to think about that day!"

Olive broke down and hid her face in her hands, while Zizi's thin little arms crept round her and held her close.

"Only one more query, Miss Raynor," and Wise spoke very gently; "are you—were you—engaged to Amory Manning?"

Olive lifted her face and spoke composedly: "No, Mr. Wise, I was never engaged to him. We were good friends, and I think he had a high regard for me; but no words of affection ever passed between us. I admire and respect Mr. Manning as a friend, but that is all." And then a lovely blush suffused Olive's face, followed quickly by a look of pain; and we knew she was thinking of Rivers and his possible defection. Never have I seen a woman's face so easy to read as Olive Raynor's. Perhaps because of her pure, transparent character; for in my enforced intimacy with her, as I managed her estate, I had learned that she was an exceptional nature, high-minded, fine, and conscientious in all things.

"I cannot think," Olive went on, "that Mr. Manning will ever be found. I think he has been killed."

"Why?" asked Wise briefly.

"You know, he was a secret-service man. Many times he has had the narrowest escape with his life, and—I'm not sure of this—but I think now he was on the track of the nest of spies with which my—with which Mr. Gately was mixed up. A few slight incidents, otherwise unexplainable, make this clear to me now, though I never suspected it before. My uncle disliked Mr. Manning, and it may have been because he knew he was in the government's employ. And though I know Mr. Gately would never

have moved a finger to put Amory Manning out of the way, yet George Rodman may have done so. Oh, it's all so mysterious, so complicated. But of this I'm sure—Case Rivers is in no way connected with the whole matter. He is a man from some distant city, he is unacquainted in New York, and he—” Here Olive broke down utterly, and fell into a hysterical burst of weeping.

Zizi rose and gently urged Olive to go with her from the room. A silence fell as the two girls disappeared. It was broken by Mrs. Vail, who remarked dolefully: “I do hope that nice Mr. Rivers will come back, for dear Olive is still in love with him.”

“What?” cried Pennington Wise. “Miss Raynor in love with Rivers! That will never do! Why, we've no idea who he is. He may be a fortune-hunter of the lowest type!”

“Oh, no, no!” denied Mrs. Vail. “He is a most courteous gentleman.”

“That doesn't count!” stormed Wise. “Although perhaps I spoke too strongly just now when I called him names!”

“Especially as he has no name!” I put in. “In fact, he calls himself a self-named man!”

Wise smiled. “He's a witty chap,” he conceded, “and I like him immensely. But it's up to us, Brice, to safeguard Miss Raynor's interests; and a possible suitor for the hand of an heiress ought, at least, to know his own ancestors! And then again, unless he recovers his memory and can deny it, there's a fair chance that he had some hand in the Gately murder. We can't get away from that snowflake pattern drawn on the blotter. Rivers was there in that room; he sat at Gately's desk, opposite Gately himself—I mean, of course, this is the way I reconstruct the matter—and if he didn't shoot Gately then and there, at least, we have no proof that he didn't.”

“I think he did,” I admitted, for Wise's statement of the matter was convincing; and besides, Norah thought so, too.

“Well, you think again!” came in a wild little voice, and there was Zizi at my elbow, fairly shaking her little, clenched fist in my face. “Mr. Bad Man Brice, you've got a

lot of follow-up thinks a coming to you, and you'd better begin 'em right now!”

She looked like a little fury as she danced around my chair and exploded the vials of her wrath. “That Mr. Rivers is a perfectly good man; I know! He and Miss Olive are in love; but they don't hardly know it themselves—bless 'em! And Mr. Rivers, he won't tell her, anyway, 'cause he's a nobleman—one of nature's, maybe, and again, maybe he's a real one from Canada or wherever he hails from. But, anyway, he no more killed anybody than I did!”

“All right, Zizi; bully for you! As a loyal friend, you're there with the goods!” Wise smiled at her. “But after all, you've got only your loyalty to bank on. You don't *know* all this.”

“I've got a hunch,” said Zizi, pounding one little fist into the other palm, “and when it comes to certainty, death and taxes have nothing on my hunches!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLEAR AS CRYSTAL.

“HELLO, people! What's the matter, Zizi? I'll be on your side! Bank on me, little one, to the last ditch. And, by jumping Jupiter, Brice, I believe the last ditch is coming my way! No, I haven't got a strangle-hold on that eloping memory of mine yet, but I 'ave 'opes. I've had a glimmer of a gleam of a ray of light on my dark, mysterious past, and I beflew myself straight to good little old Dr. Rankin, who's my trouble man every time. And he says that it's the beginning of the end. That any day, almost any hour now, I may burst forth a full-memoried and properly christened citizen.”

“Good for you, old chap.” And thrilled at the elation of his tones, I held out my hand. “Go in and win!”

“Oh, won't it be fine when you remember?” cried Mrs. Vail, wringing her hands in excitement. “Why, I knew a man once—”

“Yes”—Rivers encouraged her in his kindly way—“what happened to the lucky chap?”

“Why, he was affected something as you

are—or, as you were—” But Wise couldn’t stand for what seemed likely to be a long story.

“Excuse me, Mrs. Vail,” he interrupted her; “but, really, I must run away now, and I want a word or two with Mr. Rivers first.”

The good lady subsided, but it was plain to be seen she was disappointed.

“May I come in?” and a smiling Olive appeared in the doorway. “Am I wanted?”

“Are you wanted?” The eager, hungry smile Rivers gave her was pathetic. For it was so spontaneous, so gladly welcoming that it was as if a light was suddenly extinguished when the man, on second thoughts, hid his real feelings and advanced with a courteous but rather formal air.

“You’re always wanted,” he resumed lightly, but the joy was gone from his tones, and a mere friendly greeting resulted. Surely he was a gentleman, but he would make no advances while uncertain of his claim in full to that title.

And then he looked at her curiously, as if wondering whether she would hold any place in his restored memory, should the restoration really occur.

It was Zizi who broke the silence that fell on us all.

“I want my way, Penny,” she said, in such a wistful, pleading tone that I felt sure no breathing human heart could refuse her.

“What is your way, Zizi?” Wise said gently.

“I want us all to go—all of us—over to Mr. Gately’s office—”

“Come ahead!” cried Rivers. “I promised old Brice here that I’d go this very day, and I broke my appointment. Sorry, old man, but I had to see friend doctor on the jump. Let’s go now, in accordance with the witch’s whim, and we’ll take the big wagon and all go.”

He often called Zizi the witch or the elf-child, and she liked it from him, though she usually resented any familiarity.

She smiled at him, but I noted an undercurrent of sadness in her gaze, and I knew she was thinking of the evidence of the snow crystal.

For though Zizi liked Rivers a lot, and

though she really had faith in his innocence of wrong-doing, yet her whole fealty was to Pennington Wise, and her hunch about the snowflake drawing might lead to disastrous results in more ways than one.

Olive shrank from going to her guardian’s office—she had never been there since the tragedy; but a few whispered words from Zizi persuaded her to agree to accompany us.

And to help matters, I told her that if she preferred not to go into Mr. Gately’s rooms, she could remain in my office with Norah while we went.

Mrs. Vail insisted on being of the party, and ran briskly off to get her bonnet.

The atmosphere seemed peculiarly charged with a feeling of impending disaster, and yet not one of us would have held back. Pennington Wise was very grave and quiet; Zizi, on the other hand, was as one electrified. She sprang about with quick, darting motions, she giggled almost hysterically, and then suddenly became most gentle and tender. She ran for Olive’s wraps herself, and bringing them, put them on with the careful air of a mother dressing her child.

Olive herself was as one dazed. She now and then looked toward Rivers, with a shy yet wistful glance, and he looked back with a big, hearty smile that seemed to warm her very soul.

We piled into the big touring-car, and made a quick run to the Puritan Building.

Then we all went to my office first. Norah did the honors as prettily as any hostess in her own home, and her ready tact helped Olive to overcome her dread of the place.

“Well,” said Rivers at last, “what are we waiting for? I thought we were to go over to Mr. Gately’s rooms. Perhaps Miss Raynor and Mrs. Vail would prefer to stay here with Miss MacCormack.”

“No,” said Olive firmly. “I want to go, too.”

Norah looked at her uncertainly. Then, probably realizing that for Olive to remain behind would be harder than to face whatever might happen, she said quite casually: “Very well, then, Miss Raynor; let us all go.”

I think we were all imbued with a sense of fear, a sort of premonition that the visit across the hall would be productive of grave results.

Rivers was the most light-hearted of the party, and yet I somehow felt that his cheerfulness was forced.

"The keys, Brice?" he said. "Oh, you have them. All right, my boy, go ahead."

And then the same stillness that was on the rest of us fell on him, too, and we entered the rooms in silence.

I went first, through Jenny's room, on to the middle room, and paused just beyond the desk.

Rivers was next, but Zizi pushed her lithe little body through the group, and came through the door directly ahead of him.

Rivers entered with the strangest look I have ever seen on any human face. It was a transition—not sudden, but gradual—from the dark of forgetfulness to the dawn of memory.

And then, just as he neared Amos Gately's desk, Zizi, without seeming insistence—indeed, without seeming intent—guided him to the chair opposite Mr. Gately's desk-chair.

Mechanically, almost unconsciously, Rivers dropped into the seat and sat at the great desk-table—just where, presumably, the slayer of Amos Gately had sat.

With one of her sudden, swift motions, Zizi put the telephone receiver into his left hand, which involuntarily opened to take it, and thus exposed to view the snow-crystal drawn on the blotter.

A dead silence fell on us all as Rivers sat there staring at the little sketch. He fairly devoured it with his eyes, his face, meanwhile, becoming set—like a veritable face of stone.

Then, raising his blank, staring eyes, his gaze sought out Olive and, looking at her, he gave a low, piercing cry—wrung from him as from a soul in mortal agony:

"I killed Amos Gately!"

I think the scene that followed this announcement was the strangest I have ever experienced. For myself, I felt a sudden sinking, as if the bottom had fallen out of the universe. In fact a whimsical idea

flashed through my stunned brain, that I was "falling through the earth" or into a bottomless pit.

The white faces that I looked at meant nothing to me. I saw them as in a dream, so dazed was my intelligence.

And then they assumed their individuality, and I saw that Olive's lovely countenance was a complete blank. Like me, she failed to grasp the full meaning of Rivers's confession.

Mrs. Vail, her eyes closed, lay back limply in a chair and groaned audibly, while Norah buried her face in a near-by silken curtain and sobbed.

Pennington Wise looked like a man who has just heard the worst, but who expected it. However, the shock had unnerved him, I could see by his tightly clenched hands and set lips, as he strove to control himself.

Rivers sat like a stone statue; only his eyes, desperate in their concentration, showed the fearful mental strain he was suffering.

Zizi—bless her—stood behind him, hovering, watchful—more like a guardian angel than a Nemesis, and with her eerie, elfin face full of anxious suspense.

"Go on," she breathed, her quivering little red mouth close to his ear, as she bent over his shoulder; "oh, go on!"

Rivers drew a long sigh; he looked round the room appraisingly, his quick, darting glance taking in every detail. He scanned the desk and all the things on it, he looked through into the farther room—the blue-room—and saw the great war-map hanging on the wall; and then he rose, straightened his broad shoulders, and shook himself as one who arouses from sleep.

Breathlessly, we who watched saw a great light come into his eyes—a new self-respect, a new sense of importance, showed in his whole bearing—and, with a smile of infinite tenderness, he looked at Olive and said:

"I am Amory Manning!"

Zizi yelled. There is no other word for it. Her shrieks of joy filled the room, and she danced about, waving her thin little arms like a veritable pixy.

"It's all right!" she cried in ecstasy.

"Oh, Penny; it's all right!" And with a spring across the room she landed in Wise's arms, who patted her shoulder and said:

"There, there, Ziz; don't flatten out now!"

Meantime Rivers was finding himself. He stood still, with his hands tightly grasping the chair-back, and his face working as he received and classified the memories crowding thickly back upon his burdened brain.

"Wait a minute," he said, struggling with his thoughts. "I know all about it, but—"

"Amory!" cried Olive; "that's *your* voice! I know you now!"

We could all note the change in his speech. Until this moment Rivers had spoken in the peculiar tones I had noticed the first time I met him; monotonous tones, almost devoid of inflection. Now his voice was normal, and even more melodious than the average.

Surely the man had found himself, but if he was really Amory Manning—well, my mind refused to go further.

And he had also said that he killed Amos Gately!

But I felt no need of asking questions, or even of wondering, for the man before us looked so responsible, so capable of self-explanation, that, like the rest of the assembly, I merely waited confidently his further speech.

"There is so much to be told," he said, and his smile changed to a look of pain. He gave another glance at Olive, and even took a step toward her; then he seemed to collapse, and sinking back into the chair he had vacated, he hid his face in his hands and groaned.

"Go on!" whispered an imperious little voice, and Zizi was behind him again, her hand on his shoulder, her tones urgent and encouraging.

"I will!" And Manning, for we felt no doubt of his identity now, spoke firmly and bravely. He did not look at Olive, and it was clear that this was intentional.

Instead, he turned to Zizi, and seemed to address himself to her.

He couldn't have done better if he wanted helpful sympathy, for the black

eyes that gazed at him were soft and tender with something in them like maternal sweetness.

This mood of Zizi's, rarely shown, was one of her chiefest charms, and Manning gratefully accepted it and let it help him.

"Shall I tell all—now and here?" he asked, glancing at Pennington Wise.

"Yes," said the detective after a moment's thought. "Yes, if you will."

"Very well, then." Manning was entirely composed now, but it was evident he was holding himself together by a strong effort. Also, he carefully refrained from looking in Olive's direction.

This alarmed me a little, for to my mind it augured him a guilty man, and that, in fact, he had declared himself to be.

Norah and I exchanged glances of understanding—or, rather, of not understanding—and Manning began his story.

"I think I will begin right here," he said in a slow, methodical way, and with the air of one who has a disagreeable duty to perform, but who has no intention of shirking any part of it.

"I remember everything—everything—and it is not all pleasant remembrance! But it must be told, and then I must go at once and report to my superiors.

"I am Amory Manning, a special agent in the secret service. I was detailed by the government to hunt down a certain branch of the enemy spy system in New York City, and in pursuance of my duty, I learned that Amos Gately was the man I sought."

Manning still kept his glance averted from Olive; indeed, he looked almost constantly at Zizi, whose dark, little face, lovely in its sympathy, seemed to drink in his every word.

"I knew all about Rodman, I was on the trail of Sadie the Link, and I came here that afternoon primarily to get an incriminating paper which would have been positive evidence against Gately, and I had orders to arrest him if he was unable to clear himself.

"We had a stormy interview, and I found the man was guilty of the blackest treason. He had been a receiver of the stolen information sold by the Link, and

had transmitted it, by secret channels of his own, to the enemy government. I charged him with this, and he put up a fight. I tried to overcome him and take him peaceably, but he was desperate, and evaded my grasp. He ran toward that map in the other room, and I stood just here, where I am now sitting.

"I had overturned the chair in our struggle, and as I suddenly saw him push aside the map and enter what was beyond all doubt a secret mode of exit, I fired at him. Of course I meant merely to wing him—merely to prevent his escape—but as I fired, he turned, and received the bullet in his heart. Of course I didn't know this at the time, nor did I know where he had gone. But I heard the car descend, and knew that it must be a private elevator.

"I ran into that room, and finding the elevator entrance, behind the map, fastened, I flew out to the hall and down-stairs. In my haste, there being no car waiting, I thought I could get down faster by the stairs. But after running down two flights, I saw a waiting elevator and got in. I had dropped my pistol somewhere when trying to stuff it into my overcoat pocket as I ran down-stairs. But I gave no thought to anything save preventing the escape of my prisoner. Of course I didn't then know how seriously he was hurt.

"I failed to find the exit from the private elevator, and never dreaming it was in the building next door, I hunted this building for quite a time. I investigated the ground floor, the basement, and sub-basement, but couldn't find it. Greatly puzzled, I began the search all over again, and then Olive—Miss Raynor, came, and—later I found that others had discovered the dead body of the man I had shot.

"I waited only to be sure of this, and then started at once to report to the Federal bureau.

"I know it," I interrupted, unable to keep quiet, as the recollection surged over me, "and you went down Third Avenue on the street-car."

"I did." Manning's face showed only an intense effort at reconstructing the scene. "I was going to stop at my rooms on the way for something I needed, and—"

"Wait a minute," Wise said. "I'm interested in the Case Rivers phase of your existence. Don't forget you're the man who fell through the earth."

A strange smile passed over Manning's face.

"I'm just coming to that," he said. "I am that man, and I tell you right now, just how, where, and why I made the trip!"

All eyes were upon him. This was strange talk—and he had been so sensible up to now. Was the hallucination of falling through the earth destined to mar his newly returned sanity?

"Go on," repeated Zizi, and the calmness of her voice restored Manning's poise, and also raised my hopes of a plausible explanation.

"You were with me, Brice," Manning looked at me, as if for corroboration.

"Yes; I was in the car with you, but we were not near enough to speak. There was a big crowd, and I was standing at the rear end, while you were well forward. But I say, Rivers, it's hard to believe that man in the car was you! Why, you're not the same type."

"Wait a minute—" The speaker waved his hand as if to check interruption. "I am Manning—I'll explain later—but now I want to get that occasion well in hand. I got off the front end of the car—I don't know what you did—and as I stepped off, a sudden fierce blast of wind nearly took me off my feet. I was right in the middle of the street, but it seemed the middle of a howling blizzard, and as I took a step—I went down an open manhole into the sewer.

"This I distinctly remember—the street cleaners were working there, shoveling the snow into the sewer. They had no business to leave the manhole open and unguarded, but that black squall was so sudden and terrific, no one could see or know anything for the time being.

"However, I knew perfectly well, as I fell in, what had happened, but then—and I remember this, too—I fell and fell—down, down—it seemed for miles; I was whirled dizzily about—but still I fell—on and on—interminably. I felt my con-

sciousness going—at first, abnormally acute, my senses became dulled, and I had only a sensation of falling—ever falling—through the earth!

"There my memory ceased. And as I next remember finding myself in a bed in Bellevue Hospital, and as I have had detailed to me the full account of my being found floating, nearly dead, in the East River, I can only accept the inevitable conclusion that I was carried by the rush of the sewer, straight out to the river, and picked up for dead.

"That a sign of life was found, after I was taken to the Morgue, was of the nature of a miracle, and only the most desperate efforts fanned that little spark into resuscitation. The rest you know. The shock, the exposure, the cold, and perhaps a blow or two on my head, all combined, resulted in a total loss of memory as to my identity or as to the events of my former life.

"I had only remaining the positive recollection of that fall"—Manning shuddered—"that interminable, that never-ending fall through the earth."

"But you fell through water," said Wise, his eyes staring at the narrator of all this.

"Not to my knowledge. My realization of falling only lasted until I struck the water in the sewer. That, doubtless, knocked me out for good and all—mentally, I mean. I have to thank my wonderful vitality and strong constitution for the fact that I really lived through the catastrophe. Think what it means! Hurtled through that rushing torrent of a sewer half filled with melted snow and water—flung out into the river, dashed about in the floating ice, and all with sufficient force to tear off my clothing—and yet to live through it all!"

"Going some!" cried Zizi, and the sparkle of her dancing eyes and the delight on her small, smiling face, made the rude phrase seem quite fit for the occasion.

"And so," Manning went on quietly, "I have accomplished my quests. I have been working hard to discover three things—my own identity, the whereabouts of Amory Manning, and—the slayer of Amos

Gately. I myself am the answer to all three questions."

A silence fell, and then Olive spoke:

"You are no slayer—you were no murderer. You shot Mr. Gately by accident, in the pursuance of your duty. You are not only exonerated, but you did a deed, in freeing the world of a traitor, that entitles you to the Distinguished Service Cross! I respected my guardian—I was fond of him—but now that I know what he was, I have only contempt and hatred of him! You, Amory, are a hero—my hero!"

Olive held out her hands with a beautiful gesture of affection, and Manning strode across the room to her side.

"I have the only forgiveness I care for," he said, and his face was radiant. "Now, I must go at once, and report. My duty lies to my country—to my government! Oh, there are so many things yet to think of! They—the government—offered a reward for me!"

"Which you have won yourself!" exclaimed Penny Wise.

"Yes," chuckled Zizi, "and you've won the reward offered for Mr. Gately's"—she hesitated—"for the man who freed the world of one more traitorous viper!"

"And, incidentally," I added, "you've cleared up the puzzle of the man who fell through the earth!"

"It is well that Gately is no more," Manning said, musingly; "he was especially dangerous because he was in such a high position and so trusted by everybody. Rodman was an equal scoundrel, but he worked inconspicuously. Gately banked on his reputation for honor and probity—used his own well-earned fame to further the meanest cause on earth!

"Whatever happens, I'm glad he is unable to do further harm. I didn't mean to kill him—it was an accident—but the world is well rid of him."

"Amen," said Olive softly.

"Well, the end justifies the means," said Mrs. Vail, a little hysterically. "Why, once I heard of—"

Ruthlessly, I shut her off.

"Accept my greeting, Mr. Manning," I said, offering my hand to our new found friend. "I'm proud to know you!"

And then there was a scene of hand-shaking and smiling welcome such as any hero might be proud to receive.

"Wait a minute," Manning said at last; "that day I was hunting a paper, you know. If it was sent off there will yet be trouble from it. Has it been found, do you know, Mr. Wise?"

"No; what sort of a paper?"

"One of the stolen telegrams. It was concealed, I had reason to think, somewhere in Gately's desk."

"Do you know that?"

"I think so—wait—I had just thought I knew where to look for it when Gately said something that made me telephone for assistance in his arrest. I was waiting for an answer to my call—"

"When you drew the snow crystal!" Zizi cried.

"Yes," he smiled. "And then I saw something that hinted at a possible hiding-place—ah, here it is!"

He stepped to the door and picked up the heavy, ornate, gold penholder. He fussed with it a moment, and then unscrewing it in the middle, showed that it was a cleverly constructed place to hide a tiny roll of thin paper.

There was such a roll in it, and pulling it out, Manning grinned with glee. "All right," he cried joyfully, "this is the paper—a government secret! See, you read it by that carriage-call check, and it's safe now!"

It was a paper filled with rows of letters, such a paper as had been found in Sadie's possession and also in that of Rodman.

"Now, I am satisfied," Manning declared; "and now I must go straight down to the Federal bureau to make a report. But first—"

"Sure!" said Zizi, reading his thoughts, "we're excused."

And with a saucy smile she flew over and kissed Olive heartily. Then, with an imperious air, she took command, and almost before we knew it she had herded every last one of us, except Olive and Manning, across the hall to my office.

I was the last to go, and Manning smiled broadly as he called after me: "I want

Miss Raynor to say once more that she exonerates me, and then I'll report to my other superior."

Laughing happily, I entered my office, and found it a scene of hilarious gaiety. Mrs. Vail was positively cavorting about as Norah waltzed her up and down the room; Pennington Wise was sitting on the corner of my desk whistling dance music for them, and Zizi, her arms waving, executed a sort of glory dance of her own making-up.

After a time the door of the Gately room opened, and Olive's blushing face appeared, followed by that of the man who fell through the earth.

"I want to correct a misstatement of mine," she said; "I told you I wasn't engaged to Amory Manning—but—but—I am!"

The two came over to my office, and the ovation we gave them was second only to our reception of Manning himself a few moments before.

"Are you sure it is Manning?" Wise teased her.

"Yes," said Olive most seriously. "You see he was in disguise when he was himself, and so—"

Her voice was lost in the shout that went up at her remark, and she looked around in bewilderment.

"She's right," said Manning, smiling, "I was. You see, when I became a secret service man I had certain peculiar duties assigned me, and it was important that I shouldn't be known. So I adopted a permanent disguise—oh, nothing much—merely a mild dye for my hair and beard, which washed off easily, and a pair of big, horn-rimmed specs, which were really rather becoming than otherwise. But Olive, and many of my acquaintances knew me only in this way. I wore a Vandyke beard, and a small mustache of the Charles I type.

"Then, you see, when I was taken in at the hospital, and shaved, I continued to adopt a clean-shaven face. Also, the dye was thoroughly washed out in the sewer, and as my memory was washed out with it, I experienced no surprise at finding a light-haired man in my mirror.

"Olive tells me, too, that my voice was of a totally different caliber, due, no doubt, to a certain vacuity made in my brain by the loss of my memory. Oh, well, that's the story. And but for my peculiarity of drawing snow crystals—a thing I've done just about all my life—and but for Zizi's quick-witted realization of this habit of mine, I might never have regained consciousness of my true personality!"

"Probably something else would have brought it about," said Wise, "but your drawing of the snow crystals began with Brice's first interview with you. I ought

to have found that drawing on Gately's desk long ago! Stoo-pid!" and he beat his head in mock self-abasement.

"Yes," said Zizi, giving Wise a smile that was both impudent and affectionate, "you should have, O Wise guy! You ought to have found that snowflake drawing for yourself."

"Oh, that's what I have you for, Ziz; to look up clues for me."

"Of course you do, Penny Wise. I'm only your Pound Foolish, but at least, I can see through a clue that is as clear as crystal!"

(The End.)



Blonde or Brunette

by
William C. Lengel

TWO short weeks in each year, Kenneth Howard flowered forth into his real self. For fourteen days he lived—this interval constituting the real essence of existence, his dream of life as it should be. The other fifty weeks on the calendar served a two-fold purpose, for his dream to take form and to permit him to corral sufficient coin of the realm to make his dream blossom grandly.

In this long, monotonous period, it was as if a huge spring were being wound up, slowly, surely, tediously, painstakingly. But always there was the joyous anticipation of that titillating sensation in store during those two glorious weeks, those two weeks when the spring was released, when

it loudly whirled and wracked dramatically along till its action was spent. Then once again the grind of rewinding.

Kenneth was a draughtsman, one of a dozen or more in the great building organization of Bertram R. Dunham & Company. He was a dreamer. His fellow employees wondered how he managed to hold his job. And when, now and then, from out the depths of Kenneth's dream state there emerged a vision of architectural beauty and grandeur, the self-same fellow-employees called him a lucky stiff and swore that he had a stand-in with the old man.

But Bertram R. Dunham played no favorites. He knew Kenneth Howard's weakness and also his strength. He knew

that dreamers with constructive vision are far from numerous, so he watched Kenneth's development—a slow process at times—and he was certain that his young protégé would some day rise to great heights. But having himself married young, he had told himself that marriage and its attendant responsibilities would be Kenneth's salvation. That would steady him.

The old man really expected little of any one. He was by way of being a cynic. He had no sons, and his daughter was—so they say—odd. She did all those unconventional things that win their way into the society columns and after into the news columns of the daily papers. Now she was reported engaged to what the old man called “a worthless young good-for-nothing.”

Kenneth knew not of Bertram Dunham's interest in him; it would have scared six months' growth out of him if he had. And he knew less, if possible, of the old man's personal affairs.

So for fifty weeks Kenneth dreamed over the draughting table and planned ahead for his two weeks' vacation. No stupid country place, no equally stupid lake-shore resort tempted him. For his fourteen days' of freedom he chose the city, and during that period he posed as a careless bon vivant, a boulevardier, man-about-town.

This year his release from drudgery was particularly pleasant and opportune. As he had left the office he had handed in his entry in the Designers' League's Annual Town Planning Competition for Juniors. For months Kenneth had labored at the office and in his room of nights on his “model workmen's village.” He had just fallen short of winning first prize the previous year, and this was his master effort. Should he be successful, it would mean a scholarship in the Beaux Arts, and two wonderful years in Paris.

Mr. Dunham was one of the judges of the competition, and so as to avoid any possibility of favoritism on the part of any of the judges, the plans were submitted with a key number insuring the anonymity of the participants.

But now Kenneth's plans were in—that was yesterday. In the past was his job, his

prospects in the competition and everything else connected with his workaday life.

To-day he was breakfasting in state. It was eleven o'clock, and the place was Rector's. As he lingered over his coffee, Kenneth bore the unmistakable earmarks of a pampered young man, brought up in that traditionally well-known lap of luxury. His bearing was one of indolence, his attitude one of indifference. But his mind was thoroughly awake.

Lacking two weeks, it was now a year since he had honored Rector's with his presence as a guest; a fortnight hence, and this gilded hostelry would see him no more until autumn once again rolled around.

This was the first day of his metamorphosis; the draughting-board and all it signified were things of the past, and he would not permit himself to think of them as looming up in the future. As soon as he finished breakfasting, he would go around to McFadden's gymnasium and pay twenty-five cents for the privilege of watching “Young” Sullivan skip the rope, punch the bag, and go through the motions of boxing with his sparring partners, in preparation for his bout with “Kid” Bullard. After that, Kenneth planned to drop in for a moment at the Blue Fountain Room's *thé dansant*.

And, then for the Great Adventure! Morrie Samuels, the local impresario, was engaging people for his big fall musical review. This afternoon his office would be full of “pippins,” and Kenneth was to be on hand to view the beauties of the chorus as they appeared off stage. It was to be a “big” first day for him, and he sat and smiled in pleasurable anticipation as he slowly puffed his cigarette.

The waiter came to the table. “Like to look over this morning's paper, sir?” he asked, offering Kenneth a copy of the *Star*.

As he glanced up to thank the waiter, his gaze rested on a table that he had not been able to see from the position in which he had been sitting. He almost stared into the eyes of a girl who was as fresh and charming and beautiful as the most perfect of magazine cover creations. She was just old enough not to be too young, and her somber eyes, teeth, dark

hair, rose-colored complexion, her saucy little hat, and trim tailored suit, all combined to make her more alluring and attractive than any girl he had ever fallen in love with at first sight.

For the ostensible purpose of spreading open his paper, Kenneth shifted his chair so as to be able to view her without turning his head. His heart fluttered.

Her two escorts were very healthy-looking and able-bodied, and Kenneth almost writhed at the complacent manner in which they accepted her appealing smiles. Once or twice she glanced his way, but always, it seemed, past him, not at him. She seemed so happy and carefree.

He felt the blood rise to his cheeks and his face grew hot. He turned the sheets of the paper and made an effort to read. On an inside page, his eyes caught a head-line which attracted his attention:

**SAYS BLONDES ARE MORE CAPABLE
AND EFFICIENT THAN BRUNETTES**

Kenneth scanned the article, an interview with one Miss Cynthia Whitehead, well-known lecturer on character reading, and one of that new, vast horde of "efficiency experts." Miss Whitehead elaborated at some length her conclusions as set forth in the head-line. Kenneth then scrutinized his new-found divinity. Her eyes, gleaming under black lashes, were of a midnight hue, as was her luxuriant hair.

"Bosh and drivel, that yarn," commented Kenneth as he folded the paper. He glanced at the girl with a new interest. Suddenly her manner changed. All along she had seemed so sweet and demure. Now she was aflame. Apparently she had taken umbrage at something said by one of her companions, and the passage of heated words that followed leaped swiftly to a dramatic climax when she rose from her chair, and surveyed the two young men scornfully and defiantly.

"I'll show you," she said determinedly. She stamped a dainty foot, and left the table.

"Helen!" exclaimed one of the young men, jumping up, but his companion caught him by the arm and forced him back into the chair.

The girl flew up the stairs, and Kenneth followed her with his eyes, until even her trim ankles were no longer visible. In a few minutes her escorts paid their check and left, and Kenneth sat meditating until the fire of his slowly burning cigarette scorched his fingers. With the vision of the girl still before him, he reread Miss Whitehead's theory. "Newspapers must be up against it for something to print to publish such rot," he said to himself. And then there came to him a noble impulse; he became possessed of a serious purpose in life. In behalf of all the beautiful brunettes in the world, and one in particular he would take it upon himself to disprove the cruel and unjust statements of Miss Cynthia Efficiency Whitehead.

Thrice armed is he whose cause is just, and the crusader's spirit of fire gleamed in Kenneth Howard's eyes as he quit the restaurant. He proceeded to the office of his friend, Marshall Littleton, newly engaged in the practise of the law.

"You're an employer of feminine help, Marshall," said Kenneth, when, seated in Mr. Littleton's little cubby-hole office, he told of the article in the paper, and of his determination to prove the conclusions false. "Which are most efficient—blondes or brunettes?"

"I plead guilty to being an employer of the fair sex," admitted Mr. Littleton, glancing quizzically around the narrow confines of his one room, "but my situation in regard to your query is peculiar. The girl who comes in here occasionally from the public stenographer's office for an hour's dictation was a brunette during the first two months I knew her; for the last week or ten days she has strangely appeared to be a blonde. Now if you will drop around in say six weeks hence I may be able to tell you of the relative efficiency of—"

"I came for counsel and advice, and not for an alleged humorous dissertation," broke in Kenneth heatedly.

"Certainly, Ken, old top," answered Littleton soothingly. "I think you have a good case. Why not gather together a half dozen brunettes, and we will bring an action for libel against the paper and this

efficiency expert. We can show injury. Just look at all the employers who will read that article and refuse to employ any but blondes. Look at the hardships and suffering it will cause among brunettes! This thing grows on me the more I think of it. Of course, if we were commercially inclined, we might corner the peroxide market and make a fortune. Just think of a world filled with ravishing blondes."

"No! No!" exclaimed Kenneth. "I am not interested in all that. I only want to prove that she is talking through her hat; that brunettes have it all over blondes in every particular, intellectually and otherwise."

"I get you," Littleton assured him, laughing covertly. "We have recourse to history. Let us look to the famous feminists of all ages whose locks are of a golden or a raven hue. To name only a few there are: Xanthippe, Millie N. Bustle, Lot's wife, Teresa Gamba Guiccioli, Fatima, Mrs. Noah, The Gibson Girl, Helen of Troy, Pocohontas, Neva Bungay, Little Red Riding Hood, Lola Montey, Joan of Arc, Delilah, Mother Hubbard, Cleopatra, Molly Pitcher, Mrs. Solomon, The Vestral Virgins, Venus de Milo, Mme. Bovary, Polyxena, Marie Antoinette, Jeanne Du Barry, Mary Stuart, Athena Parthenos, Empress Josephine, Catherine the Great of Russia, Nell Gwynne, Eve, and Mrs. Grundy.

"Which of them are brunettes?" asked Kenneth.

"Take your choice," said Littleton magnanimously. "Your guess will be as good as any one else's."

"Marshall, this is a serious matter with me, but you refuse to regard it in that light," complained Kenneth, as he arose to leave.

Littleton followed him to the door. "Who is she, old man? Tell me about her! She must be some girl to get you all het up like this."

"Oh, Marshall, she is beautiful beyond your wildest imagination," said Kenneth fervently. "I only saw her once; I probably will never see her again, but I will love her forever and ever."

"You certainly have been hard hit," said

Littleton, not without sympathy, but when Kenneth had left the room, he muttered: "damphool."

Kenneth glanced at his watch and discovered he had missed his chance to-day to watch the training stunts of Young Sullivan, and *thé dansant* now seemed to hold forth little promise in the way of adventure. He wandered around disconsolately until late in the afternoon; then he hurried along Michigan Avenue. Perhaps he could obtain some first-hand data at Morrie Samuels's. A Broadway atmosphere greeted him here. The reception-room was crowded with vapid-faced chorus men, bright-eyed and brilliant-cheeked chorus girls.

The principals in the cast of the new show sat quite aloof in one corner. Basil Keane and Lorna Donaldson, local favorites, were to be the featured players, but there was much speculation as to who was to furnish the necessary cash for financing the enterprise. Musical comedies are costly; Morrie had discovered that for himself when he dropped twenty thousand dollars on a previous production two years before. The wise ones knew he was not risking his own money, if he had any left, on this new show.

Kenneth attracted no particular attention when he entered the room; the confusion of tongues at Babel was intelligent jargon compared to the shrill chatter that here assailed his ears. Good listeners were at a premium. Every one was excitedly trying to tell some one else of certain sundry exploits of his own. Kenneth stood by the door and his head and heart nearly burst from the excitement of being in such close touch with these people of that fairy world behind the footlights. Blondes and brunettes, real and unreal, swam around before his fascinated eyes.

The door to Morrie Samuels's private office opened. At once the vocal confusion subsided and there was a mad and concerted rush in that direction. There is no such thing as precedent in things theatrical. First seen, first heard is the rule. But Morrie waved them back as he held open the door, and bowed ceremoniously over the hand of a charming young lady.

For Morrie to show such gallantry was to the onlookers something strange and unheard of, and they stared at him amazed. If they were amazed, Kenneth Howard was struck dumb; not at Morrie's unprecedented courtesy, but at the likeness of his visitor. She was his subject, his brunette, the young lady of the affair at Rector's—an actress. He gasped, and held to the knob of the outer door for support. Evidently her interview with Mr. Samuels had been a favorable one, because she smiled radiantly as she crossed the room.

She paused directly in front of Kenneth, while he stood staring at her. "Am I a prisoner?" she asked sweetly.

Then Kenneth awoke to the fact that he was obstructing the doorway. He held open the door and she smiled her thanks. He followed her out and it seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to fall into step with her on the way to the elevator. They both reached out to push the "Down" signal for the elevator and their hands touched, and the slight contact sent a thrill through Kenneth. He stepped aside to permit her to enter the lift, and then followed along behind her.

"Have you signed up with Morrie Samuels?" he asked, assuming what he vaguely imagined to be the air of a professional actor.

She elevated her eyebrows inquiringly.

"I mean are you going to have a part in his new production?"

"Oh, that's quite a secret," she answered. "All the details are not settled as yet. Are you to be in the company?"

"I can't think of anything that would give me greater pleasure," he responded, truthfully enough.

"I hope you will be," came the surprising comment.

Kenneth was as one whose body had been transferred to another and distant astral plane; he was here on earth in spirit only. He was conscious of the movement of his legs as he walked, but beyond that the world was a whirling panorama. He felt himself to be a part of it, but apart from it. He had heard that persons in a stupor are brought to consciousness by

being hit sharply on the balls of their feet. So immediately he stamped on the pavement.

The girl laughed. "Rehearsing one of the Russian dances?"

"No," said Kenneth awkwardly, "my foot was asleep." Then he felt like kicking himself. How different this was from what he had so often planned he would do should he ever meet a girl in this way. He wanted to hang his head in shame, and he did.

They strolled along Michigan Avenue; it was growing dusk. The street lights began to flicker and glow, and shop windows all along the street suddenly became ablaze. There is no better incentive to romance than the twilight hour, "whose mantle is the drapery of dreams." Ugliness fades; harsh lines soften into mystic shapes. Here is a high spot in nature's subtle drama.

Both Kenneth and the girl sensed it. "Isn't it wonderful?" she breathed.

"Wonderful!" he echoed.

They paused to enjoy the full sense of it. Suddenly the spell was broken.

"I must hurry home," she said. "Will you hail a taxi for me?"

Go! Was this to be the end of his romance? Kenneth looked around wildly. What could he do to keep her just a little while longer. They had stopped directly in front of a diminutive but pretentious florist's shop. The window decoration embodied a profusion of violets.

"First," said Kenneth, "I want you to have a bunch of violets; they are my favorite flower, and I want to remember you and this meeting through their association. Then you will always be my lady of the violets."

"How poetic and fanciful you are," she smiled. "Violets are my favorite, too, and I'd love to have them!"

"As a remembrance of our meeting?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes-s," she said slowly. "As a remembrance of our meeting."

They went into the florist's together, and as she pinned at her waist a bunch of the beautiful little shy blossoms of the wild woods, the soft, subdued strains of orchestral music reached their ears. Ken-

neth opened the door at the rear of the shop, and then of a sudden, the full tone of the music reached them. By what strange coincidence was it that the musicians were playing a piece that had been popular in a musical comedy which had lived its happy days, and then passed on? Kenneth and the girl stood gazing at each other, almost awe-stricken, as they listened to "The Message of the Violets."

"What do you know about that?" asked Kenneth. "It's the orchestra in the Pompeian Room. We are in the Annex. Listen," he continued, "it is too late for you to go home to dinner; won't you dine here with me?"

From her manner he was afraid she was going to refuse, so he pleaded pathetically. "Do!" he urged. "You don't know what a sad thing it is to have to dine alone, and you can't begin to realize how happy you would make me."

She hesitated, seeming to ponder the proposal.

"Please," he begged, and his eyes were eloquent.

Then the girl appeared to find something humorous in the situation, and she laughed. "I'd love to," she said. "I've never dined with a real live actor before."

"Actor! Actor! Because she saw me at Morrie Samuels's, she thinks I'm an actor," ran through Kenneth's mind, "and" the thought persisted, "if she has never dined with an actor before, she can hardly be an actress, after all. Then, who is she?" He shook his head in perplexity as they made their way from the florist's shop into the dining-room.

If coming events really cast their shadows before them, it is certain that Kenneth's step would not have been so jaunty when they were shown to their table. The music was soft, the lights subdued. He had given the order for their dinner when a shade fell across their plates. He glanced up; so did the girl, and she smothered a cry.

Before them stood, wabbly to be sure, and flushed of face, the young man who had been the other principal in the affair at the restaurant that noon. He held to the table in an effort to steady himself.

"Helen," he said, "get your things and come with me! Aren't you ashamed to be seen dining with this—this—this actor person? To think of you doing such a thing!"

Here was something Kenneth had not anticipated. He glanced at the girl apprehensively. But already the shock of the sudden attack seemed to have passed, and her face betrayed no emotion.

"I'm surprised that you should forget yourself so far as to create a scene," she said. "Since noon to-day, Bob, we have traveled different paths. Please don't annoy me any more."

"Helen!" he cried, actually so, because in his self-pity the tears coursed down his cheek.

The girl looked helplessly at Kenneth. "Be on your way," he ordered, with pseudonymous levity.

"I'll, I'll settle with you—later," came back the threat from Bob. He made his devious way to a table on the other side of the dining-room, rejoining the husky youth who had been with him at luncheon. There they sat with their eyes on Kenneth and his fair companion.

Conscious of this scrutiny, Kenneth found conversation difficult. He was ready to go when they had finished their dinner, and suggested as much.

"O no," pouted the girl. "You don't mean to say that you are afraid, do you?"

"Certainly not," protested Kenneth.

Nevertheless, all the music that the willing little band of Hungarian musicians coaxed from their instruments was rank discord to Kenneth Howard. This serious turn in the adventure was not altogether to his liking. It was more than he had bargained for. The girl, however, did not seem to be in the least perturbed, and did not appear to notice that he was not supporting his end of the conversation. Perhaps he was not intended to have a very big part in the dialogue. His nods and monosyllabic utterances served admirably.

Kenneth breathed with relief when the two young men, with many truculent glances in his direction, took their departure. Soon the girl's vivacity, her fund of small talk, held him once more. How her

eyes sparkled with enthusiasm when she touched on equal suffrage, the uplift work of the Drama League, the Russian Ballet; how pensive when she talked about *his* joyous and exciting life on the stage.

"You actors are like sailors, with a sweetheart in every port. I just know there is some girl in every one of a dozen cities who is just mad about you."

"Indeed not," he said, but flushing with pleasurable conceit at the accusation.

"Oh, you can't fool me," she retorted. "But, tell me, and tell me truthfully—do girls really write you a lot of love letters?"

"I've never received one in my life," he solemnly assured her, but she showed by her manner that she did not believe him.

It was after ten o'clock when she signified that she was ready to go home. He was surprised to find it so late; the time had passed so quickly. Now, for certain, his day-dream of love would be soon at an end. The doorman called a taxi-cab and as they were about to step into the machine, Kenneth asked: "Where shall I tell him 'Home, James'?"

"No. 6 Lincoln Parkway," she told him.

Kenneth started—No. 6 Lincoln Parkway—the address certainly was familiar to him, but he could not recall what made it seem so. He ceased to give it any thought at all however, when two figures—now only too familiar to him—emerged from the shadow of the building and hailed another taxi.

"No. 6 Lincoln Parkway," Kenneth ordered the driver, "and go like 'ell."

They got the jump on the other cab, but not enough of a lead to take the interest out of the race. The girl soon discovered they were being pursued and knelt on the seat so as to watch the pursuing vehicle from the tiny window in the back of the car. She clapped her hands childishly and found no end of enjoyment in the situation.

"Oh-h, isn't this exciting?" she squealed, claspng her dainty hand around Kenneth's arm. It was as an electric shock, this action of hers to both of them, but in different ways. Under her soft touch his biceps hardened, and he was thrilled. His blood, which had become cold, as scenting

impending disaster, it ran hotly through his veins.

The feel of his taut muscles signified strength and power to her, and still kneeling on the seat watching their pursuers, she looked down at Kenneth.

"Your arm is like steel," she said. "You may have to make use of it. I should not have permitted you to come. Are you afraid?"

"Did you expect me to be?"

"No," she replied, "but I always had imagined that actors, living the life they do, were soft and—"

"Listen, dear lady of the violets," he whispered, catching hold of one of her hands, "I am an actor only in the acting I have done to-day in letting you believe me to be an actor. I am only an humble being of the work-a-day world. For two weeks each year I am a faker, a pretender, a poser. I play that I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth, and that from great, well-filled bags, a steady stream of gold has flowed into my pockets. As a matter of fact, I slave for fifty weeks to have my dream, and the steady stream of gold is the bits of change I lay away every Saturday."

The girl looked at him strangely. "I'm glad you're not an actor," she said, and her eyes were luminous.

"Lady of the violets," he continued. "I saw you for the first time this morning. I have never been in love. I guess I was never meant to be before, because when I saw you, all the forces of love that had been pent up for so long came into being, and my heart yearned for you. If *you* could only know!"

"Perhaps I do," she whispered. "I saw you, too, for the first time, this morning."

"You can't mean that—that you—" he cried incredulously.

She only increased the pressure on his arm.

A speeding, bouncing taxi-cab, an ecstatic lover lifted to glorious heights, a villain that pursueth! What more to make the most craven heart grow valiant? The heart of Kenneth Howard was sound and stout and true normally. Now, let even

the legions of the king spring to the attack, and he would be ready, yes, eagerly waiting.

He peered through the little window; the other taxi was not to be seen, and he became almost as wild as a predacious bird cheated of its prey.

"Who were they?" he demanded, and there was ferocity in his voice, a cave-man note indicating rightful possession.

"One of them is Lester Holmes, the other, Bob Spencer. I was engaged to Bob, until noontime to-day. I guess that's why he's so wild."

"You broke off with him?"

"Certainly! Why shouldn't I have? I never even cared for him, let alone loved him. We became engaged on a dare. I think I did it just because father does not like him. Poor old dad, he'll be mighty glad. Why, Bob began to think he owned me, so to-day I told him we had better part company now than have to call in the courts to part us later. He would commit murder now, but he'll get over it."

As they crossed an intersecting thoroughfare the other taxi-cab came tearing down the street in an effort to intercept them.

The girl glanced out of the window. "We're home!" she said, and their driver slackened his speed as he turned into the sidewalk. "Don't stop a moment, but follow me!" she commanded.

She threw open the door, and as they leaped from the cab, Kenneth thrust a bill, his last one, into the hand of the driver. He hoped it was enough to cover his fare, but he did not wait to see. The girl's word was law, and he plunged across the sidewalk and up the stairs of the stoop to an old-fashioned private house. She inserted the key in the lock and opened the door just as the pursuing car stopped and its occupants tumbled out.

"Take a long step," cautioned the girl, "father has the place all rigged out with burglar alarms and you have to know how to avoid them."

Once inside, she slammed the door. "You just wait here for a moment while I run up-stairs," she said. "I'll be right down and help you get out the back door."

"Why, I really believe you think I'm afraid!" he said.

"No, but I'm not taking any chances with you," she answered. "You stay right here, and do not turn on any lights." And in the dark she reached up and kissed him.

Then he heard her ascending the stairs.

Who can describe the sensation of that pressure of her warm lips on his? Is any kiss ever like the first one? To Kenneth, for the time being, matter did not exist, the world was saturated with ether. "Man's usual fate—he was lost upon the coral reefs." He stood dazed, trembling. Finally he glanced out of the front door.

The taxis had gone and the two pursuers were holding a council of war on the sidewalk. One seemed to be in favor of storming the fort, but the more cautious tactician seemed to argue in favor of starvation of the garrison and surrender. His judgment prevailed, so they sat down on the lower step of the stoop and waited developments.

The fitful glare of a street lamp illumined the hall sufficiently for Kenneth to find his way about. He discerned a large painting on the wall and he cautiously struck a match; shading the tiny glow with his cupped palms. His heart almost stopped beating; then to make up for it, it thumped so rapidly that it took away his breath. Now Kenneth knew why the address the girl gave him for the taxi driver's direction seemed so familiar.

He was in the home of Mr. Bertram R. Dunham, his boss, president and guiding spirit of Bertram H. Dunham & Co. That accounted for the burglar alarms. Every inventor of a new device for use on buildings was given an opportunity to try it out on Mr. Dunham's house. It was just one of the "old man's" eccentricities.

The girl, of course, was his daughter, so well known for her own peculiar, modern-day, worldly activities. The truth must not be denied. Kenneth got cold feet.

The girl seemed to have been gone for quite a long time. At first he wondered at her delay in returning. Then he began to hope she would not return. He wanted to remember her always by that soul-enraptured kiss. What an inglorious end to a perfect and thrilling day! He knelt down at the foot of the stairs as at a shrine;

then he blew a kiss into the darkness above. He looked out of the front door; the two sentries were still on duty, effectively blocking exit in that direction. Kenneth planned a different course of action. He stepped into a room just off the hall and struck another match. Smiling at him was the girl, not in the flesh, but as caught by the camera. There was no idea of theft in the heart of Kenneth Howard when he possessed himself of that photograph as a memento of this wild evening.

Then he felt his way across into another room, where a window opened out onto a stretch of lawn. He carefully turned the latch and succeeded in raising the lower sash about three inches when he heard a faint, tinkling sound. He redoubled his efforts, but the window seemed to stick—strain and struggle as he would. He was about to try another window when suddenly he discovered the awful significance of it—the windows were equipped with one of old man Dunham's pet burglar-alarms.

Kenneth did not have time decently to tremble with the fear that tore his soul to shreds and sent cold chills and hot spasms through his body, before all the electric lights assumed life and the entire lower part of the house was ablaze. He stood blinking foolishly in the sudden flood of light, not knowing which way to turn.

He was in a large study-workroom. Spread out on a table in the center of the space were sets of plans. He recognized them at once as entries in the Designers' League Competition. He thought he recognized his own half submerged among rolls of others.

He was tempted to look at them—all of them, but the insecurity of his position caused him again to turn to his work on the window. If he should be discovered in this room, all his hopes of winning the competition would be gone, while the mere fact of being found here under such suspicious circumstances—

But his efforts with the window were as fruitless as before. He was about to turn and dash out the front way, taking his chances with Bob and his blood-thirsty companion, when:

"What interests me," said a quiet voice,

one that he knew only too well, "is, how you got in."

There is no guilt like the guilt of the innocent, and no real culprit caught red-handed could have made a sorrier showing than did Kenneth. His back was turned and his head hung in shame. How could he face his employer? And could he tell of coming home with Helen Dunham? No! But why should he conceal it?

"Turn around!" came the command, and there was nothing to do but obey. He tried to look into the eyes of his employer, who stood attired in a dressing-gown, pointing a dangerous-looking weapon at him.

"Great guns!" he cried. "Kenneth Howard! What in the name of Heaven does this mean? What are you doing in my house at this time of night?"

"I—I—can't say just now, sir," faltered Kenneth.

"Well, I guess you will say, and damn quick, too! Come, now!"

"I—I—can't," protested Kenneth.

"Oh, boy, how can you stand there and tantalize me? Don't you know you're breaking my heart? Here I've been watching over you for three years now, nurturing the spark of genius you have, and now I find you here like a thief in the night, looking over the plans of the competition."

Now Kenneth felt worse than a murderer, and when he tried to speak he lost the power of articulation.

"What's that you have under your coat?" suddenly demanded Mr. Dunham.

"Nothing!" declared Kenneth.

Mr. Dunham knew better, and he advanced to investigate. Kenneth began to back away.

Then there ensued a terrific racket in the front, and Mr. Dunham, marching Kenneth before him, opened the door. Four blue-coated policemen piled in. They had captives. They dragged in, none too gently, the young gentlemen who had been a torment to Kenneth Howard for the better part of the day.

"These young devils was actin' as look-outs, sir," reported the sergeant, while one of his men went to the back door to admit another detachment of police.

Mr. Dunham looked at the two captives

in open-mouthed astonishment. "So you have a hand in this, too, have you!" he said to the young man, who up to noon that day had been engaged to marry his daughter. "I thought I forbade you ever to come into this house!"

Bob tried to shake himself free from the grasp of the policeman.

"Who wants to come into your house? Somebody 'll pay for this damn outrage," Bob retorted sourly.

"Turn 'em loose," Dunham ordered the police. "I'll have to get at the bottom of this in my own way."

The mystified gendarmes somewhat reluctantly released their prisoners; Dunham turned to his late prospective son-in-law. "I'm not going to waste words on you. Take your bandit friends and clear out."

"That fellow is not my friend," said Bob, pointing to Kenneth. "Here I was trying to do you a service. Next time I'll know better. Saw him go into the house; knew it was for no good purpose, so we were lying in wait for him. Figure it out for yourself. I'm through with you and the rest of your family. Come on, Lester!"

"No, you don't! Let's get this straight. What have you to say about this, young man?" Dunham asked Kenneth.

But Kenneth was saved from answering. Flying down the stairs came the girl, her dress in disarray and her midnight hair tousled about in beautiful disorder. When she caught sight of the room full of blue-coats she screamed.

"Helen!" shouted her father. "By the Lord Harry, I'll bet you are at the bottom of this."

She ran to him. "Send them away," she whispered, indicating the policemen.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Dunham, to the guardians of the peace, who stood by, an interested audience, "this appears to be strictly a family affair. I suppose that darn burglar-alarm worked only too well. Much obliged for what you've done. I'll not forget it." And he bowed them out.

"Now tell me all about this little mix-up."

"Bobby will have to go first," said the girl determinedly. "He's not to become a member of this family after all."

Complications had come so rapidly that by now Mr. Dunham decided not to become unduly excited by any new development, so he merely smiled grimly and pointed in the direction of the door. Bob and his companion made a silent exit.

"Now are you ready to enlighten me on the strange events of this evening?" asked Mr. Dunham.

"Well, you see," began the girl, "Bobbie and I had our last quarrel to-day. He had the effrontity to tell me I could not go on the stage—"

"Go on the stage?" echoed her father. "What in the—"

"No, father, don't interrupt. Mr. Samuels is to let me understudy the leading part, and I'm going to have an interest in the production; invest some money in the show—'be the angel,' they call it."

"Well, we'll let that pass for the time being. But that does not explain why I find Kenneth Howard here looking over the plans of his fellow competitors."

"Oh, that's not his fault. It's the fault of your old burglar-alarm. Bobby saw us dining together and got jealous and chased us all the way home in a taxicab, and I was going to shut off the burglar-alarm so he—"

"Us? He?" questioned her father.

"Him and me," announced the girl, pointing to Kenneth.

"Where did you meet my daughter?" Mr. Dunham asked Kenneth.

"At the theatrical office," Kenneth answered.

"Are you going on the stage, too?"

"No," replied Kenneth. "I was there on a little investigation I was making and—"

"What sort of an investigation?"

"I'd rather not say, sir," said Kenneth.

"Out with it," ordered Mr. Dunham.

Kenneth rather shamefully pulled a folded page of a newspaper from his pocket, and handed it to Mr. Dunham:

**SAYS BLONDES ARE MORE CAPABLE
AND EFFICIENT THAN BRUNETTES**

read Mr. Dunham aloud, and he glanced through the article. He found it difficult to keep the corners of his mouth from

twitching. "What were you investigating about that?" he demanded.

"I am going to prove it's not so," asserted Kenneth, looking at Helen and her dark beauty with eyes that were brimming over with love.

"Ah, a great light begins to dawn," said Mr. Dunham. "And have you brought your investigation to a satisfactory conclusion?"

"Yes and no," said Kenneth. "I've proved the lady who made the statement was all wrong, but I should like to continue my research on my particular subject; but with your permission, of course, sir."

"Don't you mean with my permission?" asked Helen, placing her hands on his shoulders.

Kenneth looked from one to the other—his boss and his new divinity. Mr. Dunham surveyed them, then shrugged his shoulders. So Kenneth answered Helen directly.

"Yes," he whispered. "With your permission." As he raised his arms, the photograph he had taken fell to the floor. Mr.

Dunham saw it, and smiled with great relief as he turned to examine his burglar-alarm window.

"I was beginning to think you had deserted me," Kenneth accused her.

"Oh, ye of little faith!" she said. "Father's burglar-alarm which held you captive here at the same time automatically barred the door to my room. I had to break the glass in the transom and climb through to reach you. Why, I must be a perfect sight."

"You are as beautiful as a rose-garden at dusk," whispered Kenneth.

Mr. Dunham went to the table where the plans were. "I'm sorry, but I'll have to throw your scheme out of the competition. You've forfeited your chance to win the big prize this year."

"I don't want it," said Kenneth. "It would take me away to Paris, and I can't go now. I've won a bigger prize that will keep me here."

And his "efficient" brunette reached up and efficiently approved his remarks by giving him a most efficient and thoroughly lovable kiss.



PETE watched with overt intolerance the clumsy, amateurish efforts of Ed Mason, who was desperately but futilely trying to chop the tough, thick husk from a coconut. Finally he could stand it no longer.

"Mistah Ed, don' you know you can't

git dat husk off'n dat coconut wid no hatchet? Dat ain' no way to do it. Han' it heah."

Pete took the nut over to three sharp wooden stakes, placed to form a triangle. Inserting the smaller end of the nut in this rude husking machine, he gave two or

three expert twists, and the husk was removed. With a nail he punched holes in the eyes of the nut.

"Dah now! Drink de milk—it's sho' good fo' you. Make you fat."

Ed Mason drank the milk from the nut; then breaking the shell, ate a small piece of the rich, juicy meat.

"You got that trick of husking nuts from the natives, didn't you, Pete?"

"Yassuh. Sho' did. Knows all 'bout dat bus'ness. Been heah in Tela, Honduras, mo'n twenty yeahs. Been heah since eben when dah wa'nt no Tela. Come fum up in—"

"Oh, yes, I know all about that. You come from every place in the States. Some of these guys that you sting are going to knock the devil out of you some day. You got me all right when I first came. You certainly know something about my home town. I gave you two dollahs. You worked the same game on Roberts; he believed you came from his home town. You pull it on every one that comes hear. How you know something about every place in the States, and how you get on to where the fellows that come here to work for the United Fruit Company are from, is beyond me."

Mason picked up a small rifle.

"Do you want this coconut? I'm going over there and see if I can get a shot at an iguana."

"Thanky," said Pete with his mouth instantly full of coconut. "You's too hard on me, Mistah Ed. In co'se I tells all de boys I's fum dey home towns, an' I's fum whuh I says I's fum. Yassuh, dat's so. Didn't I tell Mistah Tom Roberts all 'bout Houston, Texas, fo' he evah tol' me he wuz fum dah? Didn't I tell you all 'bout—"

"Sure you did." Mason lighted a cigarette. "That's the point. I don't know how you know all about every town in the States, nor how you get on to where every fellow is from. It's a cinch, though, that you find out in some way, for you've always got the right dope."

Mason turned away, but Pete's conversational mood was not to be denied.

"Mistah Ed, whut kin' o' pin is dat you got on yo' coat dah?"

"My frat pin."

"Kind o' lodge?"

"Uhuh."

"I'd sho' like to jine some kind o' lodge. Dese niggahs heah ain' got 'nough sensibility to git up nothin' lak'n to dat."

"Why don't you organize a lodge yourself? Then you'd be the high mogul, and lord it over these other coons."

"Dah now! Sho' could. How does you go 'bout gittin' up a lodge?"

"Well, you got to have a president, treasurer, and—"

"Dat's 'nough. I'll be bofe o' dem, an'—"

"I expect the others would have something to say about that. You'd have to have officers, by-laws, dues, benefits—"

"President, treasurer, an' dues! Dat's 'nough foh me. Dem other niggahs kin have de benefits when I gits through wid de dues."

"You could get some of these American and Jamaica negroes to help you organize. Not many American negroes here, but there are plenty of Jamaicans. I suppose you'd take in some of the natives, too."

"Take in anybody whut's got de dues. I gwine see 'bout dat right now."

Pete hot-footed it away to that part of Tela where the people of his color resided.

He found Joe Wallace and Trial Green discussing the fighting ability of a game rooster that they intended entering in the following Sunday's cock fight.

"Howdedo, gen'mans, howdedo. I's jes' been lookin' foh bofe o' you. I's fixin' to organize a lodge. De Knights an' Ladies o' de Guidin' Light. 'Nitiations is three dollahs. Dues is twenty-five cents a week, fus fo' weeks payable in 'vance."

The others were impressed but cautious.

"An' who gwine handle dis money?" asked Trial.

"I gwine handle it."

"An' I reckon you gits ten puh cent foh all you takes in an' ten puh cent foh all dat is paid out. I knows all 'bout dese fellahs dat handles de money in lodges."

The idea struck Pete as a good one.

"Yassuh, dat's whut I gits. Dat's whut I wuz gwine tell you."

This was a lie. Pete had not thought

of that part before, having been content with the importance that such a position would give him, but Trial's suggestion was worthy of adoption. If the lodge could only be made a large one his financial problems would be solved along with the glory he hoped to reap.

"Whut Pete means is he's gwine git ten puh cent each o' receipts an' disbu's'ments," said Joe.

"Dat's me, seats an' bussments. Dat's mah paht."

"I'll jine aftah I sees dat de thing's all right," said Trial. "When's you gwine organize?"

"To-morrow night. In dat vacant house nex' to de Railroad Salume. I gwine fix up foh dat. Be dah at seven o'clock."

"Us 'll be dah."

Pete hurried away on his mission of soliciting members for the new lodge.

The following night the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light was fully organized, with a membership of twenty-seven. Ten of these were American negroes, seven men and three women, and the rest Jamaica negroes, five of whom were women. Pete was at the height of his glory. He was president and treasurer.

In addition to the initiation fee of three dollars and the four weeks' dues payable in advance, each member had to pay for his or her uniform, which was to be worn on certain occasions. These were to be purchased from the lodge, which gave Pete still more fees.

Uniforms, however, were to be done without until a little later date, when the lodge should be financially strong enough to buy the uniforms for its members and let them pay for them on the instalment plan. Certain sick and death benefits were embodied in the rules of the lodge, all of which Joe Wallace, the secretary, explained at length and in detail to Pete.

Just exactly what uses the lodge would serve, Pete hadn't any clear idea. He only knew that being at the head of a lodge would give him a certain prestige among the members of his race, and the discovery that he was to get pay for it came as a pleasant surprise.

Next day Pete had a visitor at his little

cabin on the edge of town. He was decidedly annoyed.

"Huh! I sees dat mad niggah, Big Gun, comin' up heah. Wondah what he wants now?"

Big Gun came, his massive shoulders swinging belligerently.

"Mawnin', Pete."

"Mawnin', Big Gun."

"Mistah Big Gun, you means."

"Dat's right, Mistah Big Gun. Sho' does mean jes' dat."

"Heah you niggahs been organizin' a lodge."

"Sho' is."

"I's comin' in it."

"Be mighty glad to have you in de Knights an' Ladies o' de Guidin' Light. Cost you three dollahs to jine, an twenty-five cents a week dues, payable fo' weeks in 'vance, an' de regalias an' things lik'n to dat, dey all mus' be bought fum de lodge, but dat paht don' come jes' yit. We ain' got de money in de treasury to buy all de things we needs, so we jes' gwine hol' it till we gits a little mo'."

"Ain' gwine cos' me nothin' to jine."

"How come dat?"

"I's gwine be a officer in de lodge."

"We done got a secretary, an' de bearers o' de light—an'—"

"Shet up, ol' niggah. I ain' tawkin' 'bout none o' dem little ol' offices. I's gwine be de treasurer."

"But I's de treasurer."

"You's *been* de treasurer. Now *I's* gwine *be* de treasurer. I heah you's de president. One office is 'nough foh one man."

"But I gotta be de—"

"I gwine be de treasurer, or I gwine be de treasurer *an'* president, too, an' put you clean out 'n de whole thing. Now what—"

"Now don' git all excited lak dat, Mistah Big Gun."

"Look heah, ol' niggah. You don' know me good, I guess. I's bad medicine, I is, an' you don' want to projec' wid me, else 'n I'll sho' disagree wid you bad. I's bad medicine. You knows me. I ain' de kind o' niggah lik 'n dese funny-tawkin' Jamaica niggahs dat says '*hi ham goin' hup*,' plac'n 'I's gwine up.' I gwine be de treasurer, or

I gwine be de president *an'* treasurer, an' you won't be nothin'."

"Dey done 'lect me to be de treasurer."

"Dey kin unlect you. I tell you whut. I'll be de 'sistant treasurer."

"Dat's all right." Pete smiled his relief.

"When kin I git in de lodge?"

"We's gwine have a special meetin' to 'tend to some business to-night. You kin git in den."

That night Big Gun became a member of the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light. He was also elected assistant treasurer, but the other members of the lodge impressed Pete fully with the fact that as treasurer he was responsible for all lodge funds.

As soon as the meeting was over Big Gun called Pete to one side.

"Gimme all de money."

"Whut's dat?"

"You heerd me, ol' niggah. Gimme de lodge money. De 'sistant treasurer keep dat."

"Who say dat?"

"I said it," and Big Gun reached for the highly nickeled revolver that gave him his sobriquet.

Pete was at least discreet. He produced the funds.

"Heah it all is, Mistah Big Gun. Heah it is. You is de mos' reckless man whut I ever is seed. You jes' can't take no joke no how. Dah's ninety-five dollahs dah."

"Ought to be mo' dan dat."

"How come?"

"De lodge is took in mo 'n a hundred dollahs."

"I gits ten puh cent o' all dat comes in, an' all dat goes out. I done got my ten puh cent on what's come in, an' we's had to pay out a dollah or so on gittin' de lodge-rooms fixed up. De United Fruit Company don' charge us no rent."

"All right. I jes' don't want you to come no skin game on me, ol' niggah."

"I ain' gwine to, Mistah Big Gun; don' you make no misconception 'bout dat."

Pete did not like having Big Gun mixed up in the lodge. Neither did any of the other negroes, for that matter. They were all afraid of the bad negro, but the troubles

of the others were as nothing to Pete's. Pete was responsible for the money that Big Gun was carrying around in his pocket.

As soon as Pete reached home he took a careful survey of his few belongings. He poured the contents of boxes out on the floor; he ran his hands behind the few cheap pictures that adorned the walls. Finally he gave a sigh of relief. He walked to the door and looked at something he held in his right hand.

"Dah now! I knowed I had dat rabbit's foot somewhah. I gwine keep it in mah pocket. Can't take no chances wid dat Big Gun. Dis heah 'll fix him, all right."

Next morning Pete went over to the United Fruit Company's stables, and begged from the stableman an old horse-shoe. This he nailed up over his front door. Bad luck must certainly let him alone now.

The week passed, and Pete felt that the rabbit's foot and horse-shoe must be doing the work, for Big Gun seemed to be living a decent sort of life. True, Big Gun was not working, but as he seldom worked, Pete gave this but little thought.

But a few days later, as Pete was passing the office of the United Fruit Company he heard some one call to him. When he saw that it was Tom Fraering, of Shreveport, Louisiana, he didn't want to stop, but was afraid not to. Fraering had arrived in Tela only a few days before, and Pete, as was his custom, had learned in some manner where he was from, and then went to him, claiming to be an old, down-and-out negro from Shreveport.

Fraering had been so impressed that he had given Pete three dollars, one dollar more than the story usually brought. Pete knew that some one must have told Fraering by this time that he had been stung.

"Yassuh, white fo'ks. Whut kin ol' Slave'y Time Pete do fo' you. Yassuh thanky, suh."

"Uncle, do you want a dog?"

Pete felt relieved.

"Yassuh." What negro does not want a dog?

"Here's a dog around the corner here that's in bad shape, but if you'll feed him up a little he'll be all right," and Fraering

led the way to the dog. Pete saw a small, yellow canine that was evidently descended from every breed of dog under the sun. He had the ears of a bloodhound, the jaws of a bull dog, and the head of a Boston terrier.

"He's jes' dawg, ain't he," Pete commented. "Whuh did you git him, boss?"

"He just came along. Been hanging around here a day or so. I've been bringing him something to eat. I've got no place to keep him. Here's a dollar. Take him home with you and buy him something to eat. He's about starved."

"Thanky, boss. I'll have dis(dawg so fat in a few weeks he wa'n't know hissef, yassuh, dat's so."

Pete had a job getting the dog home. He carried him part of the way, dragged him part of the way, and the dog walked part of the way, but they finally got there, and Pete spent half the night doctoring, feeding, and rubbing the animal.

"Bones is a good name fo' you, ol' fellah, fo' dat's whut you is," he told the canine in christening him.

A day or so later Pete saw Big Gun in the Railroad Saloon, favorite rendezvous for Tela's colored population.

"Wondah whuh dat niggah got money to buy whisky wid—I wondah if'n he's usin' de lodge money?" Cold perspiration stood out on Pete's forehead. He knew what would happen to him if Big Gun made way with the lodge money.

He entered the saloon as quietly as he could.

"Mistah Big Gun, please, suh, could I keep de lodge money till in de mawnin'—I—"

"Git outa heah, ol' niggah. Fade away. Don' you projec' roun' me. I's bad medicine, I is, an' I ain't gwine stan' no foolishness fum you."

"Dat's all right, Mistah Big Gun; I didn't want no rookus wid you."

"Rookus wid me?" Big Gun laughed. "If 'n you had a rookus wid me, you wouldn't nevah have *nothin'* wid nobody else. Git out'n heah, 'fo' I blows you through dat wall wid mah gun. I's bad medicine, an' ain' gwine stan' no pestification fum no ol' niggah lak you."

Pete hurried out. He could hear Big Gun and his friends laughing at the manner in which he had been disposed of.

"Big Gun's showin' off 'fo' dat crowd o' Jamaica niggahs. Kin' of a new crowd in dah. Mus' jes' got heah. Dis crowd don' say '*Hi ham hin ha 'urry*,' plac'n 'I's in a hurry.' Dey tawks lak white fo'ks, an' when niggahs tawks lak white fo'ks it's time fo' ole Pete to be gettin' away quick."

Pete walked down the street a short distance, and was standing looking at the low mountains that stood just back of Tela, when he heard some one calling to him:

"Mistah Pete! Mistah Pete!"

Joe Wallace came hurrying up.

"Whut does you want, Joe?"

"Mistah Pete, you knows Sat'd'y night is lodge night."

"Yeh. Whut 'bout dat?"

"De members all done 'cided to vote at dat meetin' to order de regalias. Dey wants to dress up an' p'rade some."

"Us ain' got 'nough money to buy de regalias."

"Mistah Hooper, de 'Merican white man whut's got de sto', say he'll git de things fum de States an' let us pay foh dem in 'stalments, but he's got to have whut money we's got on han' in 'vance. De members all say dat's whut dey gwine do."

"Dat will have to be voted on."

"Dey gwine vote on it Sat'd'y night, an' den dey's gwine right to Mistah Hooper wid de money an' git de things ordered. You an' Big Gun is mighty close together, an' if'n Big Gun is got dat money you better git hold to it, 'cause dey's gwine be trouble if'n dat money ain' on 'han' Sat'd'y night, an' I understan' Big Gun is spendin' money right an' lef'."

"Uhuh."

Pete realized that he was up against it strong. He knew that there was no way to prevail on Big Gun to give him the money; he knew that without the money he was certain to have trouble Saturday night.

In this troubled frame of mind Pete walked out to the eastern edge of the town and strolled along under the coconut-trees

that skirted the coast, growing up to within a hundred yards of the beach.

"Mah bus'nness sho' is gittin' in a jam," Pete muttered to himself as he walked along. Suddenly he brightened.

"Dah now! I sees Kid Scoot. He kin fix everything up all right. 'Hey, Kid! Wait a minute. I wants to speak wid you.'"

Kid Scoot was a States negro, and a prize-fighter who was said to have won many bouts on the Canal Zone, but after the work was completed there he had migrated to Tela, and was for the time being up against it financially.

"Kid, dat Big Gun is got me in uh bunch o' trouble."

"Say he is?"

"Yeh." Pete explained his predicament.

"Dem niggahs gwine hol' you 'sponsible foh dat money?"

"I know dey is."

"You started de lodge, an' is de treasurer, an' dey gwine say you introduced Big Gun as a candidate foh membership."

"Dat's right."

"An' now he's de 'sistent treasurer, an' got all de money."

"Yeh. An' I ain' s'posed to let him have it, needer."

"He's gwine lose it or spen' it all in a day or two."

"Kid, you know I give you eatments once foh two weeks when you didn't have nothin'."

"I 'members dat."

"I wants you to go down to de Railroad Salume an' git Big Gun on de outside an' take dat money 'way fum him."

"You jes' wants me to do uh little job, don' you?" Kid Scoot's sarcasm was evident.

"Now, but Kid—"

"Dah ain' no buts about it. You wouldn't run into no buzz-saw, an' I ain' gwine do it."

"Is you skeered o' Big Gun?"

"I ain' skeered o' nuthin'."

"Well, den, why don' you do dis foh me, Kid? You knows I's yo' frien'."

"I knows dat you's mah frien'. We ain' sputin' 'bout dat."

"You'll he'p me out, den?"

"Nothin' doin'! I'd git 'rested."

"You kin git some little boy whut don' know you to go in an' tell him uh woman wants to see him, an' he'll come out. Den you kin jes' knock him cold, git de money, an' git away fum dah in uh hurry."

"Can't do it."

"Kid, is you got any money?"

"Not a cent."

"I got five dollahs dat I'll give you if'n you'll do dat foh me."

"Five dollahs! Huh! If'n I took de money fum Big Gun I'd have mo'n dat."

"But dat would be robbin'. I only wants you to git de lodge money."

Kid Scoot had not eaten for two days, but Pete did not know that. Five dollars was big money to Kid just now.

"Gimme de five dollahs. I'll fix Big Gun."

After Kid Scoot had gone, Pete sat on the steps of a deserted house, waiting for him to reappear with the money. Five minutes went by—ten—twelve, and then he heard the roaring of a revolver, and an instant later Kid Scoot burst into view, closely followed by Big Gun, who was pouring hot lead after him. Kid Scoot did not stop to inform Pete just exactly in what manner his plan had miscarried. He would have had to crawl under the house if he had, as Pete had scuttled under the building like a crawfish.

When Kid Scoot struck the "bush" at the edge of town, Big Gun turned and went back to the Railroad Saloon.

Peter crawled out from under the house and made his way home by a circuitous route. As he entered the gate he ran a hand in one of his pockets and felt the contact with something vaguely familiar. Slowly he brought the object from his pocket. It was the rabbit's foot. Disgustedly his face set in a scowl, he threw it on the ground.

Bones was not feeling good that evening. He may have eaten something that did not agree with him, or it may have been the weather, but when Pete mounted the steps of his little shanty—Bones, who was lying across the top one, did not look up.

Pete grabbed the door-knob, and turned it hurriedly; it was caught in some way, and he gave a lunge against the door. The jar knocked the horseshoe loose, and it fell, striking Pete on the shoulder. It bounced off and struck Bones on the back. Bones jumped up and gave Pete a quick bite on the leg.

This was too much. Pete turned and kicked Bones about ten feet. Then he picked up the horseshoe and threw it at him.

Saturday afternoon came, bringing with it many misgivings for Pete. The lodge members were going to insist at the meeting that night that the money in the treasury be paid over to Mr. Hooper as initial payment for the promised lodge uniforms.

About three o'clock Pete slipped down to a little saloon on a back street to get a drink. He was afraid to go to his favorite hangout, the Railroad Saloon, for the reason that Big Gun was usually to be found there. Just as he started to enter the place he heard a voice that he recognized.

"I's bad medicine, dat's whut I is. I's bad medicine, an' I's gwine make anybody pow'ful sick whut projects' wid me. Is anybody seed dat ol' niggah Pete aroun' heah? I's gwine muss dat ol' niggah up some fus' thing he knows."

Pete's thirst told him good-by. He almost broke his back putting on the reverse, and brushed a squatty little negro to one side as he leaped down the steps. When the squatty negro regained his balance, Pete was a block away and still accelerating.

About five o'clock Joe Wallace found Pete at his little home.

"Mistah Pete, I's got sumptin' to tell you."

"I knows too much a'ready."

"Dey ain't gwine be no meetin' o' de lodge to-night."

Pete's face brightened.

"How come?"

"New preacher come to town an' ev'ybody gwine to heah him. Lodge meetin' is been excused till Wednesday night. De

preacher is gwine preach ev'y night till den."

"Preachers is good men to come along some times," said Pete sincerely.

"You ain' heerd de other news yit, is you?"

"What's dat?"

"Dey say Big Gun is fixin' to git married an' go to det States."*

Pete turned ashy.

"Who he gwine marry?"

"Rosina Hogg."

"Dat fat Jamaica gal?"

"Dat's de one."

"Uhuh!"

"Big Gun is drinkin' pow'ful lot dese days, an' de niggahs all says he seems mad wid you' bout sumptin'."

"Dat's jes' niggah news. Big Gun ain' got no cause to be mad with me. I ain' done nothin' to him."

"Sho' you ain'. You'd be daid if you had."

Pete wriggled around like a worm in a hot sand-pile. This news about Big Gun did not serve to set his mind at rest. He wished Joe would go away. He wanted to be alone. But Joe was not yet ready to go.

"Mistah Pete, whut you reckon dese niggahs would do wid you if sumptin' wuz to happen to de lodge money Big Gun is mindin'?"

"Happen—huh? Lodge money? Uhuh—"

"Dey'd jes' 'bout kill you, wouldn't dey?"

"Ain' nothin' gwine happen to dat lodge money, no suh."

"Sho', I knows dat."

"What foh you makes dem slanderin' remarks foh, den?"

"Tava'n't no slanderin' remarks, Mistah Pete. I wuz jes' wonderin'. You know how niggah's laks to wonder. Dey's wonderin' people."

"Better wonder 'bout sumptin' else. I'll do all de wonderin' dat's necessary 'bout dat lodge money."

"You sho' would do some wonderin' if'n anythin' wuz to happen to it. Dat you would."

"I wouldn't be you."

"Dat's right, Mistah Pete. Well, I's got to go."

"Good-by, Joe. May good luck be wid you."

"Good-by, Mistah Pete. May good luck keep anythin' fum happenin' to de lodge money."

"Huh!" Pete muttered to himself. "Keepin' on tawkin' 'bout dat lodge money. Wish ev'ybody'd ten' to dey own bus'ness. I knows lots o' fo'ks dat does real well doin' dat. So Big Gun is gwine marry dat Hogg gal. If'n he marries dat gal he'll be sho' to spen' all de money scus'n whether he goes away o' not. Maybe I kin break dat up."

Thirty minutes later Pete was talking to Rosina.

"How long is you knowed Big Gun, Miss Rosina?"

"Habout two months."

"Well, you don' know whut uh wuthless, low down, no 'count, thievin' niggah he is. He's been in jail mo' times dan—"

"That will do. Hi shall tell Big Gun has soon has hi see 'im," and Rosina flounced away.

"Dah now! I is played de devil," muttered Pete. "She gwine tell Big Gun whut I said, an' I don' need nobody to tell me whut Big Gun gwine do wid me."

Sunday morning Pete saw Joe Wallace again.

"You sho' is fixed yo'sef wid Big Gun now. Dat niggah gwine kill you."

"Whuffo?"

"'Bout dat mess you tol' Rosina 'bout him. She done tol' Big Gun all 'bout it."

"Mah bus'ness sho' is gittin' in uh jam."

"Big Gun gwine jam you, all right. I wouldn't be in yo' place foh nothin'. Big Gun ain' gwine leave a piece o' you bigger'n yo' hat."

Pete looked down the narrow, dusty street. From around a corner a man appeared. It was Big Gun.

Pete didn't stay there. He left behind him a little cloud of dust, but no information as to where he might be found.

Tuesday morning Tela had a sensation. Ed Mason had been held up and robbed just outside of town the night before.

Pete joined the crowd of negroes that had gathered around Mason to get the details.

"Did you see whut kin' o' lookin' man it wuz whut robbed you, Mistah Mason?" asked Joe Wallace.

"He was a big, black fellow. Tall and thick-shouldered. Wore a light-colored slouch hat, a light suit of clothes, and had on a red tie. He covered me with a big, bright-looking gun."

"Dat sounds mighty lak Big Gun!" exclaimed Trial Green.

"It sho' do," another negro said.

"How much money did he git fum you, Mistah Mason?"

"Ninety-seven dollars in silver and paper."

"Whuh is Big Gun?" some one asked.

"I seed him gwine out 'cross de bridge 'bout quatah to eight las' night," a negro volunteered.

"He pahsed my 'ouse hin the neighborhood hof height o'clock," said Felix Davenport, a West Indian negro.

"Your house is only about two hundred yards this side of where I was held up," said Mason.

"Whut time wuz you held up, Mistah Mason?" asked Joe.

"About five minutes after eight."

"Must have been that time, Mr. Mason. You left my house, which is only a short distance farther out, just a few minutes before eight," volunteered John McGinnis, a negro who hailed from Barbadoes.

"That's right. I'd been out to John's to see him about breaking a horse I've got, and on the way back I was held up. Has any one seen Big Gun this morning?"

No one seemed to have seen the assistant treasurer.

Mason took the matter up with the police department. About noon Big Gun was arrested as he came into town from the same direction that he had been seen to depart the night before. He was searched, and ninety-five dollars and thirty-five cents in coin and paper found on him.

Big Gun, although declaring that he knew nothing whatever of the robbery, re-

fused to give any explanation as to where he got the money found on him. Every one knew that he had done no work for some time, and there was no doubt in the minds of the larger per cent of Tela's population that Big Gun was surely the guilty party.

Big Gun did not have a pleasant time in jail. He felt very much mistreated. He went out to see a friend of his the night that Mason was robbed; had been seen and was strictly up against it. He knew that he did not rob Mason. He did not know, nor did he care, who had robbed him, but he did know that the money found on him, with the exception of thirty-five cents, belonged to the lodge. Finally he fell to reasoning with himself.

"Mistah Mason done specify dat if 'n he could git his money back he mout let me off. If 'n I gives him dis money whut b'longs to de lodge, Pete 'll be de one to git de devil fum de lodge members, 'cause dey don' know dat I's got it, an' hol's him 'sponsible. If 'n I 'fess's dat it's de lodge money, I'll be lucky to git in jail, 'cause dem niggahs 'll kill me sho. I gwine 'fess to robbin' Mistah Mason, give him de money, den I'll git out o' jail, an' Pete 'll be de one to have all de trouble. I don' stan' to lose nothin' nohow. Pete 'll have to answer to de lodge."

Mason came to the jail at Big Gun's request. He was inclined to be very lenient, and upon Big Gun's confession that he was the robber, and having the money turned over to him by the authorities, Mason requested that Big Gun be released.

Pete heard of all this, but said nothing. He seemed strangely jubilant for one who had recently had so much trouble.

That afternoon he was passing Rosina's house on his way home.

"Ow har you, Mistah Pete? You was quite right habout that Big Gun. Hi 'ave told 'im that hi shall not marry ha man who 'as confessed to being ha robber. Hi'm very thankful to you for warning me habout 'im."

"Dat's all right, dat's all right, gal. Trus' ol' Pete foh all de time doin' de right 'thing."

When he entered the gate at home, Pete

stopped and searched around on the ground, picking over leaves and pieces of paper until he discovered the rabbit's foot that he had thrown there a few nights before. This he picked up and put in his pocket. Then he called to Bones, but Bones, remembering the kicking he had received from one whom he had every reason to believe was his friend, was slow about coming.

Finally Pete succeeded in getting the dog to come near him as he unwrapped a package that he carried in his hand and tossed Bones a pork chop. Then Pete picked up from the ground the horseshoe that had fallen the night of his and Bones's disagreement and nailed it securely over the door.

Half an hour later Pete presented himself at the office of Ed Mason. Pete's lips were expanded into a broad red grin, and at sight of the old negro, Mr. Mason chuckled.

"Well, Pete, it worked!"

"Sho' did, boss-man."

"Big Gun got himself in hopelessly when he confessed to the robbery."

"Huh! Trouble wid Big Gun is he ain' got no brains"—then, by way of afterthought—"lak whut I's got."

"You've got them," laughed the white man approvingly. I never believed the plan had a chance. Even after I identified Big Gun as the negro who held me up and had him arrested, I never thought he'd admit something he didn't do."

"No," grinned Pete, "nor sumpin' that never happened. Wonder whut Big Gun 'd say if 'n he knowed dey nevah wuz no robb'ry *uhtall*?"

"I daren't think such language. By the way, Pete—I've got all that lodge money of yours that Big Gun paid me. Do you want it now?"

"No, suh, boss! I'll be pow'ful 'bleeged if 'n you'll keep dat foh me. If 'n I gits mah han's on dat money ag'in, Mistah Ed, de chances is it 'll go to mah haid an' I'll tawk in mah sleep. An' maybe Big Gun 'd heah me. S' long's you is got it, it's safe. By de way, Mistah Ed—I's all fret up. Ycu ain' got uh drink handy, is you?"



THE whisky-boat Black Possum was anchored at Slough Neck, and ten thousand acres or so of cotton paid tribute to it. Customers stayed away in the daytime, but at night they shambled over the bank and down to the skiff that waited all or any comers at the foot of the sand bar. The skiff, really a small motor-launch, carried the patrons across the hundred yards of dead line, into the free waters of the Mississippi, where a Federal license permitted sales on the raging, navigable stream, so far from the bank.

The proprietor of the Black Possum was Chick Blowe, so he named himself, but he looked like an alias, with a dialect modified from somewhere up the Alleghany or the Genesee. He was a thin-cheeked, stoop-shouldered, slim-waisted man, with a wide foot and a long hand. He could pick a gallon-jug up by the side and hand it to a man politely, the handle out, returning his change with the other hand.

Change? There was no change from a gallon of liquor at ten dollars. It was ten silver dollars, flat, to do business by the gallon, and three dollars a quart—but that was long ago! That was a year ago, or more, before they had horns on the wild bull of a dry State.

Chick Blowe, when people said to him confidentially that the bone-dry law had horns, replied that there was only an old

soft-head muley to the bone-dry business. And as for him, he would do business, horns or no horns. The Mississippi River was government free and public, and he had paid his twenty-five dollars government license, and he'd do business by it.

"If folks wants to come out to my boat, where I got a right to do business, why, I'm right here to do it!" he said, with the calm air of superiority that a bad man always assumes among his admirers.

Bad was just the name for Chick Blowe. He had an ugly curl to his lip, a glitter to his eye, a swagger to his gait, and a forty-five caliber automatic on his hip. Also, he had a filed-off repeating shotgun behind the bar, and the partition of the boat, behind which no one ever ventured, had a slit cut in it, through which a shotgun or rifle might be shoved, to rake the whole barroom at the height of a man's waist.

"No, sir"—Chick Blowe shook his head—"I'm peaceable! S' long's they leave me alone, I won't hurt a hair on their heads; but let 'em git impedent and I'll tell ye they'll be music along here by Slough Neck that 'll be a warnin' fer fresh people from Cairo to Vicksburg, er anyhow to Memphis!"

Of Chick Blowe's relationship to other shanty-boaters, blockade-runners, and the rest of the world, no one knew. Below Hickman and above Point Pleasant and

Tiptonville, he was the man who owned Slough Neck Bend; also, he was the man who minded his own business, whether other people minded theirs or not.

His customers came to his boat, meekly desired the favor of paying him three dollars for a quart, two dollars a pint, or ten dollars a gallon, and he dispensed his wet goods with the lordly air of a king conferring a decoration for favors rendered, or something like that.

Fishermen brought the money from three days' fishing, darkies brought the cash from two days' picking, trappers brought the catch of a week, all to do business with the stern but livable Chick Blowe. The customers, perhaps, would throw an extra half on the bar and invite Mr. Blowe to have one with them at twenty-five cents per. Blowe sometimes refused to drink with some of his customers, showing them their place. Again, he would take a very small taste.

He looked at life differently from a good many people, he explained to some specially favored up-the-banker. He didn't permit any disorder on his boat, none whatever. If a man began to look rough, why, ashore he went! The result was that he kept a perfectly respectable whisky-boat.

"They can't nobody say a word ag'in' my boat!" he declared. "Why, they don't sing to amount to anything on here; and as for cutting anybody, or doing meanness with a revolver er automatic, that's strictly forbidden.

"I'd as soon think of lettin' anybody git killed up on this boat as I would of lettin' anybody kill me er a dog. Yes, sir! That's whatever! I never had but two men shot and one cut on this boat, all the while I've been here. And both times it come so sudden I didn't have no chance to prevent a regrettable incident, in the matter of shootings, and the fellow who was cut needed it. So it wa'n't nothing to lay up against this here boat."

No one mentioned up the bank. That was something beyond Mr. Blowe's jurisdiction. A few cuttings, once in a while a shooting, and some mysteries of people found along the trails—he didn't know anything about them, and it wasn't polite to probe the ignorance of Mr. Chick Blowe.

And right at this juncture a little red-haired woman dropped down to the Black Possum and tied her skiff painter to a cleat. She walked into the whisky-boat and up to the redoubtable Mr. Blowe.

Said she: "My name's Diswa MoHane, and my man's a fisherman over by Winchester Chute. Likely you know him?"

"Yes, I know him; catches right smart of fish!"

"Yes, and he spends the money here in this whisky-boat."

"He's a man, and he's got a right to spend his own money, I expect," Blowe smiled, rubbing his hands.

"He thinks he has, same as you thinks he has," Mrs. MoHane said. "But I want to tell you, Mr. Chick Blowe, that next time, the very next time, my old man comes home without his money, with a gallon-jug, and hit half empty and him half full, I'm goin' to see that somethin' happens, and happens like hell, on this yeah shanty-boat! Don' yo' fergit that, yo' old scoundrel!"

She turned, stepped into the gloom of the rapid dusk, and her oars were dipping before the astounded Mr. Chick Blowe could recover from his amazed paralysis.

"Talk to me thataway, on my own boat!" Blowe fumed; and the two black men along the black side of the bar and the three white men along the white side of the bar shook their heads and sighed.

"Some women is powerful independent and high-spirited," one said. "My land! Who ever heard a lady talk like that? My land!"

Three nights later Catfish MoHane arrived on the Black Possum. By this time Chick Blowe had determined upon his natural course of conduct. He actually had three drinks with Catfish; then he gave him a gallon of special proof whisky, instead of the usual thirty degrees, and this special proof would surely last longer, and it would have more kick while it lasted. It would surely be a lesson to Mrs. MoHane, and she would learn to hold her tongue to a whisky gentleman minding his own business.

Blowe said so; he explained to everybody what he intended to do, and he did it. Catfish MoHane was a middling-sized,

watery-eyed, malarial, yellow-faced river-man; he was a good worker two days a week, and the other five days he wished he was rich, or he was recovering from a high-lonesome, or went up the bank somewheres, to sit around till his wife was better-natured and wouldn't talk so fast and much and according to her nature.

Blowe wet MoHane's whistle long, casually, and carefully, and plied the prod, as the saying is, telling the little man that he ought to know better than to take so much "sass" from his woman, and encouraging him in the idea that what Mrs. MoHane needed was a right good beating up, same as a naughty kid has to be whipped, every so often, to make it behave.

He talked out loud, and he gave his other customers many a hint and many an idea as to the proper treatment of people who didn't mind their own business as regards the Slough Landing whisky-boat.

"Now, when you get home," Blowe pressed on the fuddled mind of his customer, "you jes' casually haul off and give your wife a belt on the jaw, and you'll find out it 'll make all the diff'rence in the world about bein' peaceable around the little old shanty-boat!"

He patted MoHane on the back, and, on second thought, he inquired:

"Come on, boys! Le's all have another round!"

All hands lined up along the bar, and there were nine of them, eight on one side and one on the other. And just as they all raised the little glasses a shrill, feminine voice hailed from somewhere:

"Theh! That 'll do! Hands up, gemmen!"

Three or four glasses of precious liquor dropped upon the bar, and Chick Blowe turned and glared. He found himself looking into the muzzle of a double-barreled shotgun which was thrust through the little port-hole in the partition between the business and living rooms of the shanty-boat Black Possum.

"Hands up!" the voice reiterated. "Er I'll let go!"

The hands went up. Drops of nerve-shaken liquor rained down on some of the

hat brims. Two or three grinned with sickly fervor, and the others were grave beyond description.

"Now, then, Chick Blowe, clumb that bar inter the outside!"

Chick Blowe hesitated an instant, and the muzzle straightened till he could look down the whole length and see twelve buckshot at the bottom, and the powder beyond was not imaginative. Then he climbed.

"Git down on yo' hands and knees, Chick!" the voice ordered.

"I don' have ter!" Chick exploded. "No danged wo—"

A charge of buckshot tore off his leather boot-heel and scraped off half an inch of skin besides, judging by the feelings.

Chick dropped on his knees and clasped his hands in mental torment.

"On your hands, Chick!" the voice ordered.

He dropped forward wonderingly, and found himself with his face over the weighing machine platform.

"Theh! That's fine!" the voice cried; and then added: "Yo' white man, with the wash collar, git out theh and give Chick a right good kick; and don't be easy like! Kick him a good 'n fer me! If yo' spare him, I got a scatter charge er birdshot in this yeah ol' shotgun, and I'll plumb yo' the hull ounce er No. 10's, 'cordin' as yo' stand!"

"Yas, sum!" the man cringed.

He swung his leg back, but he was nervous and almost lost his balance. He tried again, and kicked. Chick Blowe's head hit the scale, and it rattled.

"Nex' feller, theh!" the voice said. "Ef yo' don' kick harder 'n that, I'll shore plasteh yo' good!"

The next man kicked harder, and the two darkies, who came last, were ashy with fear as they gathered themselves to kick with greater vigor than any who had preceded them.

Chick Blowe yelled, begged, would have jumped up, but the muzzle of the gun and the assurance of buckshot at twenty-five-foot range held him to his post.

"Once mo', all around!" the woman ordered relentlessly, and when the second series had been pulled off she ordered the

men to pull the bar out by the roots, all together. They did it. They threw it through the window, and then emptied the half barrels after it.

"Now, then, take Chick Blowe up the bank, yo' white men—'ceptin' Catfish' theh. I got business with Catfish myse'f!" she ordered.

When the men had all departed, half-carrying Chick, the door that opened behind what had been the bar let out Mrs. MoHane. She still carried her old duck-gun.

"Catfish!" she said. "Come yeah!"

The man stumbled toward her.

"Take that five-gallon coal-oil can, theh, and sprinkle this yeah cabin!"

"Lawse! This boat's wuth a thousand dollars!" the man gasped. "Yo' hain't—"

"Hit's wuth twenty thousand dollars, yo' old fool!" she declared. "Come on a scatterin' that coal oil!"

They went out onto the stern, and Mrs. MoHane looked over the side to see that her skiff was there. It was.

"Get into that boat!" she ordered; and when he was safely in the stern, she leveled her shotgun at the great hanging lamp in the barroom, through the doorway. She fired, and the lamp fell to the floor. Fire leaped in all directions across the floor, and the woman dashed out on the stern again.

Dropping into the skiff, she cast off the line and pulled clear of the big hull. Resting on her oars up the eddy, she watched

the flickering of lights through the windows, saw fire belching out of the bow doorway, and then another uprising flight of flames through the stern.

From end to end the whisky-boat Black Possum rose up in smoke and fire. It lighted the river for a mile about. The whole length of the Slough Neck caving bend was bright with the glow. On top of the bank a man stood, hunched up, staring down at the ship afire.

He was a tall man, huddled down, with a face twisting in agony. He was all alone, and he was the picture of discontent. Tears rolled down his cheeks, and he sobbed.

"Theh! Theh!" he groaned. "Theh goes my boat and theh goes ev'rything! I'm set up the bank—Lawse! Lawse! If she'd on'y said, p'like like, that she wished I wouldn't sell to Catfish—I'd 'a' been glad to be reasonable! I would—course I would! Now she's gone and kicked me, and burned me out, and—and I got ter—I got ter git a fresh start! And I cain't run no whisky-boat no more, 'count of all the dad-blasted women hearin' about hit, and how Mrs. MoHane druv me out'n business! A feller cain't fight all the women in the world!

"She neveh said she'd come the same night—she said she'd wait fer him to git home; and she come a poppin', and I wa'n't ready! Lawse!" he burst out, and then he swore, weeping: "That woman had horns! She's mean!"

MY LOVER SAYS

HE says I should not give a glance
To other men;
But 'tis no gift, for by some chance
I'm sure to get one back again—
Or two, or ten;
Besides I only look to see
If any of them look at me.

He says I ought to see as through
My lover's eyes;
But I reply that so I do,
For where he looks there I look, too;
For I am wise,
And know that *he* must look—to see
If any of them look at me!

J. E. V. Cooke.



The Log-Book

By the Editor

HE couldn't stand prosperity."

This remark was made to me a few weeks ago regarding a man who had just died after a remarkable career, in which, rising from obscurity almost at a bound, he had for a time dominated his chosen field of effort. But the sudden accession of fortune and power had gone to his head, and he entered on a course of dissipation which brought him to the grave while still considerably on the sunny side of fifty.

"He could not stand success."

So said the wife of an actor whom she has just sued for divorce, alleging that because he is earning over three thousand a week he had become utterly irresponsible. This man, in his youth, lived through all sorts of hardships in trying to make a living. He is only in the thirties now, and it would be a thousand pities if getting on in the world had marked him for a speedy exit from it.

It takes pluck, perseverance, and hard work to achieve a high position, but it requires a steady head and stern self-denial to maintain it when won.



A kingdom within a republic—an island kingdom, dreaming at dawn upon a sapphire sea, but ringed with a hostile and minatory barrier of fanged and hooded sentinels—that was the Five Isles, abode of mystery and misunderstanding.

"AVALON"

BY FRANCIS STEVENS

Author of "Citadel of Fear," etc.

is written with all the power of incomparable imagination and character-drawing which gave you "Citadel of Fear," that weirdly compelling masterpiece which lingered so terrifyingly in the memory. Now, in this four-part serial, beginning August 16, of a female Borgia who practised on the mind rather than the body, you will find yourself keenly absorbed by one of our most fascinating stories.



If *Philip Kane* had not been right-handed—but, then, he was! If he had not been congenitally bashful and sensitive—but, then, he was! Had he not been at that age when an ingrowing sense of one's dignity sometimes obsesses the mind—but, then, he was!

"A CHALLENGE TO ROMANCE"

BY JOHN BOYD CLARKE

Author of "Broadname Whispers," "The Locked Door," etc.

will be likewise a challenge to your interest and curiosity, I'm more than certain. Nothing could be stranger than a bashful knight errant whose good right arm was a

hindrance and a handicap rather than a help; and yet this was the fact, despite the ill-concealed sneer of his cousin-employer at Philip's penchant for pugilism, or, rather, fisticuffs. And then—when he had intervened in the lady's behalf right manfully—did she thank him prettily and with a becoming confusion? No—she did not. And for the rest—this is published as a complete novelette in *THE ARGOSY* for August 16.



One of the most powerful stories we have printed in some time will appear next week. "THE RAIDERS FROM POVERTY GAP" is the title and Raber Mundorf the author, fearlessly handling the fundamentals of life in a dramatic narrative of a woman's devotion and a man's utter and complete selfishness. A delightfully breezy tale is George L. Catton's "WHERE THERE'S A WILLIAM," mingling mystery, business, and love-making in a fashion to keep the interest constantly on the alert. A husband's attempts to remake a wife's character is told by Marc Edmund Jones in particularly entertaining fashion under the title "TAKEN IN HAND."



KEEN FOR THE SERIALS

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Must write and mention how some of your stories are. I think *THE ARGOSY* is the best magazine that I have ever read. Most all of the stories are good—mostly the serials. I do not care much for short stories, but "Clash of Identities," "Blue Flames," "The Devil's Riddle," and "The Ship that Crumbled" were certainly great. Give us some more of Loring Brent, Ethel and James Dorrance, and Edwina Levin.

J. H. FRAZIER.

ADDRESS MR. FREDERICK IN CARE OF THE ARGOSY

Fresno, California.

I just simply had to write you a few lines. I think *THE ARGOSY* is the best magazine going. One story I liked real well was "The Higher Strain"; and I think the serial stories are good also. I certainly would love to get in touch with Mr. John Frederick. If anybody can give me his address, will you please do it? I don't think that story could be beat. And then I like "Blue Flames" and "The Duke of Chimney Butte," too.

MISS MYRTLE GUEST.

HIS ONE BEST BET

Eureka Springs, Arkansas.

This is my first letter, but this does not mean that I do not enjoy *THE ARGOSY*, as it is my one best bet. I have been a reader of it since about 1912, and have always secured my copies from a news-dealer. The author's picture discussion seems to have died out, so I will add my wood to the fire. I am in favor of the plan, as I would like to see what my favorites look like. My favorite story is the serial, with the novelettes a close second; don't care much for the shorts. My favorite type of story is one of the mysterious East, the West, or of Russia or Siberia; and, by the way, I think a good story of Siberia would be in order. We have not had one in so long. I still recall "The Clutch of Siberia," which appeared some years ago.

My favorite stories appearing lately are:

"Peter the Brazen," "Dragon's Blood," "Booty," "Forbidden Trails," and "The Web." C. A. Seltzer, Loring Brent, Achmed Abdullah, Garret Smith, Edgar Franklin, and R. A. Bennet are all there with the goods every time.

CLYDE A. LUCKY.

THE REAL DOPE IN WIRELESS

Streator, Illinois.

Being a newcomer among the host of *ARGOSY* readers, I desire to add a few words of appreciation to those already given in the Log-Book. I am a great admirer of Loring Brent's tales of the sea and of the "wireless" ability of his heroes. I have found in so many of so-called wireless stories that the author seemingly never saw a "real" radio station, although he invariably rambles through pages and pages about "brass rods," "spark-coils," *et cetera*, which sound like a "ham" amateur's vocabulary instead of the technical slang of a transoceanic operator. Mr. Brent, however, sounds like an old-timer, and sure does put out real dope. More power to him. Allow me to praise the camaraderie which exists among your (or our now) Log-Book contributors.

R. E. BEMUTH.

LEARNED TO READ FROM THE ARGOSY

New York City.

I have just finished reading the Log-Book of the latest *ARGOSY* (April 19), and noted particularly the letter of "A Boy from the East." He seems to have a rather acute case of Western fever. However, as he likes to read the letters of the "pretty girls of the West," I shall do my best to make this a real letter.

There have been *ARGOSYS* in our house for as far back as I can remember. The first sentence that I learned to read was one from a story in an old *ARGOSY*. So you see I am quite an *ARGOSY* girl. Some of the stories that I liked best among the later issues are: "Citadel of Fear," "One-Cylinder Sam," and "Riddle Gawne." The "Peter the Brazen" stories were among the finest I have ever read, and were written by one who knew something about wireless. I know whereof I speak, because I am one of the few girls in the

West who hold a first-class amateur radio operator's license. Please give us more of those stories. I am seventeen years of age, and I live in Boise County, Idaho. Just at present, however, I am visiting friends in New York City, which accounts for the heading. With heartiest wishes for the future success of **THE ARGOSY**,
 ETHEL KIRBY.

TOO LONG BETWEEN ARGOSYS

Wichita Falls, Texas.

I have been a constant reader of **THE ARGOSY** ever since the "Land of Lost Hope" was published, some ten or twelve years ago. I bought my first number in Chicago, and have bought them in a great many different States since then. The last six numbers I have obtained in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas, as I am touring the country, and I save them all. Expect to have quite a stack by the time I reach the coast, but I cannot bear to leave them behind, as I read some of the stories many times.

Only one fault to find with **THE ARGOSY**—too far between issues. Just finished "The Duke of Chimney Butte." It was sure great, and ended just as I wanted it to. "Indian Pipes," some time back, was the best short story I ever read. I enjoy the Log-Book very much, but have never written it before.

MRS. JOHN B. LUEDIKE.

NOT A MUSHY MAGAZINE

Southbridge, Massachusetts.

About a year ago I wrote a letter to you telling you how much I enjoyed **THE ARGOSY**—all its short stories and continued ones—but since then I haven't found the short stories as interesting, though I have always read the whole magazine, beginning with the ads and winding up with the Log. I have also been a little disappointed in not finding your interesting comments at the ends of the letters in the Log. Perhaps you have been too busy writing us a story.

I like stories of mystery, impossible stories—especially "After a Million Years"—and stories of the West. I should like to read a good love story once in a while, also. Your magazine isn't at all "mushy," but I don't think a little would be out of place. "Texas Fever" is a fine story; I would hate to miss any of it.

(MRS.) GRACE L. POTTER.

Thanks for the compliment on the comments, but space is very valuable these days, so it must be conserved wherever possible. For this reason only letters that really "say something" can be printed.

MORE WOMEN THAN MEN WRITE FOR THE LOG

West Branch, Iowa.

Enclosed find money order, for which renew our subscription for **THE ARGOSY**. We are sending it in plenty time so we won't miss any of the most wonderful stories ever printed in a magazine. We are readers of the Log-Book, and enjoy it very much, and some of the letters are as interesting as the stories. I notice more men write to the Log-Book than women, and I just want to

say that it must be because women are bashful, for I'm sure that women appreciate your wonderful stories as much as men.

Mr. Sissel is trying to "put it over" on me, as he says, and trying to make me believe that a "woman doesn't know a good story when she sees it." Of course, that is to tease me, for we know better. Our taste is very much alike when it comes to stories, and I think that we like every story printed in your book. As for the authors, they must be grand people. I wish I were one to have the ability to write a story like "Forbidden Trails," "The Web," "Cold Steel," "The Devil's Riddle," and oh! many others that I could name. They must live in a world of their own, those authors, don't you think? We like the short stories, too. There are some dandies, but I can't begin on them, for I never would finish if I was to start. Wishing long life to the Munsey Company,

MR. AND MRS. THOS. L. SISSEL.

GARRET SMITH'S NEXT THE BEST YET

Newport, Rhode Island.

A few months ago I was in the Narragansett Hotel in Providence, Rhode Island, writing a letter. When I had completed the writing I leaned back in my chair and let my mind go over the events of the day. In leaning back I noticed a magazine lying on the floor. I picked it up, and it was an **Argosy**. I had always heard a great deal about this magazine, but I had never taken any particular pains to get in personal touch with it; so I began to glance through the pages. "The Sultana of Marib," by Robert Ames Bennet, was the first article in the magazine, and I began to read. There is no need of my telling you that I finished the first instalment then and there, and was disappointed in the fact that I could not get the remaining ones. Since that time I have been a constant reader of your magazine, and am very glad to say that it is very seldom I find a yarn or serial story that is not interesting.

"After a Million Years," by Garret Smith, was a very peculiar story. That is the right kind of a yarn, something that will set your mind to working. It is unusual; something that you do not run across every day. When Verne wrote his "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" and "A Trip Around the Moon" he started people to thinking, and in reality the events he portrayed in his books have in part come to pass in this twentieth century of ours. I sure did enjoy reading Garret Smith's tale, and hope that he will, in the very near future, come out with something of the same order, or even more imaginary, if possible.

When I was a boy I used to close my eyes and imagine I could walk on ceilings, see people miles away, carry on conversations with them, and all sorts of weird affairs, that only a boy's imagination could do. So Mr. Smith's stories are something like boyhood air-castles put in print.

I had not intended to prolong this letter, but I seem to have covered more than the allotted time; but I like to read the Log-Book, and wanted to express to you my feeling for **THE ARGOSY**.

W. A. SMITH.

A WEALTH OF FICTION

Have you seen the Great Midsummer Fiction
Number of

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE?

Just look at the treat waiting for you in the
AUGUST NUMBER

Hole-in-the-Wall Barrett (Illustrated by Paul Stahr)	Max Brand	424
The Flibbertigibbet (Illustrated by Gerald Leake)	Wakeleigh Rhodes	449
The Gold of To-morrow (Illustrated by F. McAnelly)	Clarence Meily	474
Please Pass the Pepper (Illustrated by F. W. Small)	Kay Cleaver Strahan	486
Safe or Out? (Illustrated by R. L. Lambdin)	Jim Egan	496
The Fascination of Guilt (Illustrated by Irma Deremeaux)	John D. Swain	541
Good-by Forever (Illustrated by C. D. Williams)	Robert Shannon	549
BOB OF ARUE (Chapters I-III. Illustrated by E. F. Ward)	Maryland Allen	404
BEAU REVEL (Chapters IX-XI)	Louis Joseph Vance	459
BROKERS IN ADVENTURE (Chapters XI-XIII. Illustrated by Lee Conrey)	George Agnew Chamberlain	504
THE SEA BRIDE (Chapters XXVII-XXXII)	Ben Ames Williams	559

There are also many Special Articles and Departments

Buy the August MUNSEY at any news-stand
before the supply is exhausted—20 cents a copy.

The
Frank A. Munsey Company

280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK



6-Piece Set
Fumed Solid Oak

\$1.00 DOWN A Room Full of Furniture

Send only \$1.00 and we will ship you this handsome 6-piece library set, only \$1.00 down and then \$2.70 per month, or \$28.90 in all. A positively staggering value, and one of the biggest bargains we have ever offered. Look at this massive set, clip the coupon below and have it shipped on approval. Then see for yourself what a beautiful set it is. If you do not like it, return it in 30 days and we will return your money. All you have to do is send the coupon with \$1.00. This magnificent library set is not shown in our regular catalog. The value is so wonderful and the demand so great that there aren't enough to go around, so send today sure. Either have set sent for you to see, or tell us to mail catalog.

6 Pieces This superb six-piece library set is made of selected solid oak throughout, finished in rich, dull waxed brown fumed oak. Large arm rocker and arm chair are 36 inches high, seats 19 x 19 inches. Sewing rocker and reception chair are 36 inches high, seats 17 x 17 inches. All four pieces are luxuriously padded, seats upholstered in down imitation Spanish leather. Library table has 24 x 34 inch top, with roomy magazine shelf below, and beautifully designed ends. Jardiniere stand measures 17 inches high, with 12 inch top. Clip the coupon below, and send it to us with \$1.00, and we will ship the entire set of six pieces, subject to your approval. **No C. O. D.** Shipped K. D. We ship K. D. so as to save you as much as one-half of the freight charges. Easy to set up. Weight about 175 lbs. **No C. O. D.—no discount for cash.** Order by No. B5634A. \$1.00 cash, \$2.70 monthly. Total price, \$28.90. Pieces not sold separately.

Act Now—While This Special Offer Lasts!

Don't wait a day longer. Sit down today and send in coupon for this 6-piece Fumed Solid Oak Library Set. For a limited time only are we able to offer you this stupendous bargain. Prices, as you know, on everything are going up, up, up. It is impossible to tell just what day it will be necessary for us to increase the price of this wonderful Fumed Solid Oak Library Set. So act, but act quickly. Fill out coupon, send it to us with first small payment and we'll ship you this wonderful 6-piece Fumed Solid Oak Library Set. **Pieces not sold separately.**

Send This Coupon

Free Trial Coupon

STRAUS & SCHRAM, (Inc.)
Dept. C107 W. 35th St., Chicago

Enclosed find \$1.00. Ship special advertised 6-Piece, Fumed Oak Library Suite. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the suite I will pay you \$2.70 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the suite within 30 days and you are to refund my money and freight charges I paid.

☐ 6-Piece Library Set, No. B5634A, \$28.90.

Name

Address

Post Office State

If you ONLY want catalog, put X in box below.

☐ Furniture, Stoves and Jewelry

☐ Men's, Women's and Children's Clothing ☐ Paints ☐ Roofing

Along with \$1.00 to us now.

Have this fine library

set shipped on 30 days' trial.

We will also send our big

Bargain Catalog listing

thousands of amazing bar-

gains. Only a small first

payment and balance in

monthly payments for

anything you want.

Send coupon now.

Easy Payments!

Open an account with us. We trust honest people, no matter where you live. Send for this wonderful bargain shown above or choose from our big catalog. One price to all, cash or credit. **No discount for cash.** Not one penny extra for credit. Positively no discount from these sensational prices and **No C. O. D.**

30 Days' Trial

Our guarantee protects you. If not perfectly satisfied, return the article at our expense within 30 days and get your money back—also any freight you paid. Could any offer be fairer!

Free Bargain Catalog

Shows thousands of bargains in furniture, carpets, rugs, curtains, silverware, ranges, heaters and jewelry, women's, men's and children's wearing apparel.

STRAUS & SCHRAM Dept. C107 W. 35th St. Chicago